a book of christmas

and epiphany

WITH DAILY DEVOTIONS

BECK • LINDBERG

A Book of Christmas and Epiphany

By VICTOR E. BECK and
PAUL M. LINDBERG

The Church Year holds depths of experience that to many church members often are quite undiscovered and unexplored. A break-through in these dimensions could become all transforming. It could bring a new understanding as to the nature of the individual Christian life. It could bring new vistas as to the meaning of the church and of the message of the gospel to all the world.

Too often the Church Year is made to consist of only two or three festival days, or perhaps a season or two, observed in a fragmentary form. Properly, each special day should be seen in the perspective of its particular season, and each season should be observed in the movement of the entire year.

In the interest of aiding Christians to this fuller experience, the authors present this volume as a continuation of their *A Book of Advent*. It aims to assist families, groups, and individuals to catch the whole range of the Christmas message as it moves from Christmas Day through the Epiphany Season.

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VICTOR E. BECK

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AUGUSTANA PRESS
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AUGUSTANA BOOK CONCERN
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1961

To

our wives and children

with whom we have shared

the rich heritage

of this Holy Season

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Christmas and Epiphany Symbols

CHRISTMAS AND EPIPHANY SYMBOLS

SYMBOLIC FORMS AND OBJECTS are abundant for the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany. And naturally so! Throughout the Christian world there have been developed a variety of ways of observance. Volumes have been written about Christmas customs around the world. The birth of Christ was an event that carries significance for all peoples and nations. When applied to the concrete situations in which men are living, it is only natural that each nation or each community would find its own way of representing outwardly the deep truths and mysteries of the Incarnation.

Christmas can be celebrated in any place where believers are found. The grazing lands around Bethlehem in the darkness of the night, the halls of the Wise Men in eastern countries, the snow-covered hills of the northern lands, the home setting of today's family, the church, or a great cathedral, or wherever men are found, Christmas can be celebrated. It is relevant for every situation of human existence—for those of low estate, and for the esteemed among men, for the discouraged, for those who have tasted life's joys and successes, for those who are still looking for the coming of the Messiah, and for those who have found Him in the child of Christmas.

From all of these have arisen many of the symbols that now are in general usage among Christians. A few of the best known that speak with common voice the meaning of the believer's Christmas experience, are herewith portrayed and explained. When man listens with discernment to the deeper things these symbols are saying, his life will be enriched.

THE LITURGICAL COLOR

White is the color for adorning the altar during Christmas and Epiphany. It is used from and with the Vespers of the Eve of the Nativity, through the Epiphany Season, except for the days of St. Stephen and The Holy Innocents, on which days the color is red. White is the color of purity, reflective of the purity of the conception and birth of Jesus. It is the color that befits the holiness of the Babe of Bethlehem, come into this world not in the sinfulness of the human generation, but in the pureness of the divine. It speaks of cleanness, life, radiance, and happiness. The color red on the days of the martyrs, in dramatic interlude, is a reminder of the blood of those who were willing to die that Christ might be made known to the world.

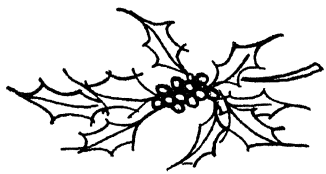
THE STAR

"We have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." The words of the Wise Men seemed to single out one star among the innumerable bodies of the visible heaven that loomed large and significant. It led them across the hills and the plains in a tedious but buoyant journey to the place where the Christ child lay. And since then there can be no Christmas without the star.

Stars are the voices of heaven. They speak in the eloquence of a heavenly language. They twinkle in hopeful reflection of the divine; from on high they speak to the earth below. They speak from a world quite beyond the human reach. They speak with accuracy and dependability. To the mariner they give location, to the worker in the dark of night they tell the hour of the night. To all men they speak of a constant God who never fails. Such also is the message of Christmas and Epiphany.

THE CHRISTMAS BELL

One can scarcely think of Christmas without the symbol of the bell. It has a happy tone at Christmas time, for it is the joyful reminder of the world's most happy event. Shoppers on the city's streets, strollers near the public buildings, worshipers in the sanctuary—all are caught up in the spirit of the ringing of the yuletide bells. Large bells with deep-throated resonance, and bells of sweet and tinkling voice, all join, each in its own way, to announce the event of God's coming to earth in the Person of the Christ child.

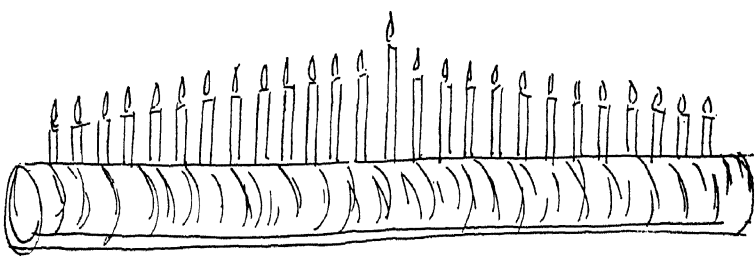


HOLLY AND MISTLETOE

The holly sprig of green with its red berries has become one of the best known of the tokens of Christmas. Though a small twig, it carries much symbolism. Hung in a doorway, or used as a centerpiece, it speaks in a voice larger than its size, saying "our preparations are now completed."

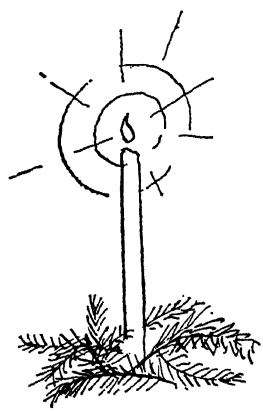
The Christmas use of mistletoe is a custom from the centuries. From the pre-Christian Celtic priests the notion existed that the mistletoe held medicinal qualities of healing; and it still speaks symbolically of the hidden powers of healing found in the Christmas story. The "peace on earth, good will to men" that echoes from the Bethlehem manger is the greatest power for healing among the nations.

One can readily understand the tradition that still lingers, namely, that the maiden is to be kissed under the mistletoe, and that she who is not kissed under it will not wed that year. The ancient custom has it that the mistletoe should be harvested with a golden knife, else its kiss will be ineffective. So it is said of the green sprig of mistletoe with its white berries.



THE YULE LOG

The use of the Yule Log is said to be of Danish origin, dating back to the pre-Christian era when the Vikings lighted their huge bonfires to honor their god Thor. Like so many other customs of pagan origin, it has been taken over and hallowed in Christian usage. In our day the log is used as an ornament, usually holding a number of candles which are lighted during the celebration. An old English custom is said still to exist in the burning of the log as a token of the doing away with old animosities existing among the celebrants and the purging of personal feuds from their lives. As a connecting link from one Christmas to another an unburned piece of the log can fittingly be saved for the following Christmas.



THE CHRISTMAS CANDLE

A lighted candle, appropriately, has been adopted by several religions other than the Christian, where the heart of man is yearning to move out of darkness into light. To the Christian at Christmas time it speaks with the special glow of warmth and radiance, a living message, announcing not that the search is on but that it is over. Christ has come, the light is here, and is now casting its beam across the nations. It is the reflection of a fulfillment of hope and expectation.

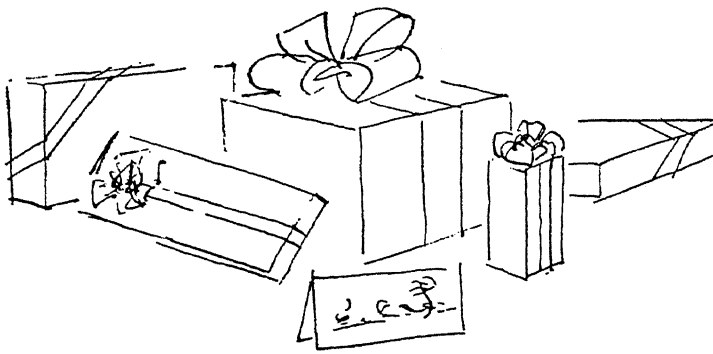
The Christmas candle goes beyond the Advent candles. Where they were lighted one by one through the weeks of preparation, as though lighting the way for Christ's coming, now during Christmas and Epiphany they are lighted every day, all of them, as a massive heavenly light shining to all the world. At the Christian "Festival of Lights," observed by some during Epiphany, they reach out to chase away the powers of darkness and to replace them with the Christ who is the light of all lights.

THE CHRISTMAS WREATH

For some the use of the wreath seems more suitable for Advent; but since there is no clear separation between its message for the various times of the year, it is good also that it should be a central symbol for Christmas and Epiphany. Usually made of evergreens or holly, it has much to say. The evergreen speaks of the continuing life which is the Christmas message. The holly speaks of the crown of thorns, with its red berries representing the drops of blood brought out by the sharp thorns on the brow of the suffering Savior; it was for all of this that Christ was born into the world. The circular shape of the wreath tells of the love of God, eternal, without beginning and without end; this is the perfect message of Christmas. Of old the wreath is the token of victory in athletic games; at Christmas time it tells of the victory of the gospel in the night of man's life when his hopes are at the lowest ebb. It was for this victory that Christ came.

THE CRECHE

The Creche is one of the most vivid expressions of the Christmas story and one of the most commonly used. It is simply a miniature model of the much-loved manger scene, and has symbolically become the center of many a Christmas celebration in home and church. The word "creche" comes from the French, even though the symbol seems to have originated in Italy where it was known as the "Presepio." In its most accurate usage the manger itself is left bare until the eve of Christmas, when the Christ child is placed in it; and while the real event of the birth is celebrated on Christmas Eve, it is at Epiphany time that the lighted candles surrounding it are carried outside to help the Wise Men find their way to the manger. In the older celebrations Epiphany was the time for the giving of gifts in the presence of the manger scene, as a token of the gifts of the Wise Men, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

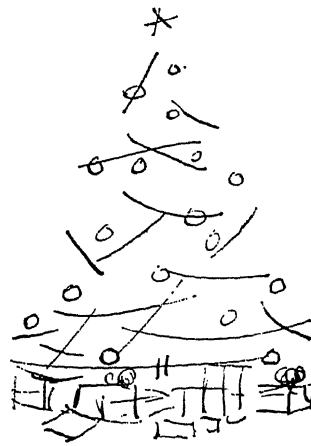


CHRISTMAS GIFTS

In the excitement of giving and receiving we often forget the deeper meanings of our Christmas gift exchange. We see these tokens of human love and esteem, sometimes sensing only the pleasure of receiving or the pride of giving, sometimes seeing only the satisfaction of the gift, or the material usefulness it represents. On occasions the gift becomes a burden to the giver, or a problem to the receiver. In the real spirit of the season it is properly thought of as a reflection of God's love so generously expressed in the giving of His Son, the greatest gift of all. Impelled by His overwhelming love, we give our gifts to those we love most personally, not for the value of the gift, but for the conveying of ourselves through the gift. Large or small, when given alongside the Christmas crib, these gifts are the human parallels of the divine gift.

THE GREETING CARD

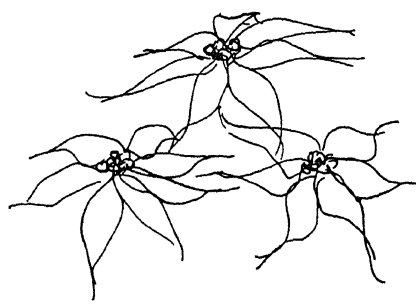
The sending of Christmas greeting cards is one of the more recent practices in our Christmas observance. The custom was first introduced in England in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the cards were hand drawn, and original in design, prepared especially for a selected loved one, and naturally done in very limited numbers. The custom has become widespread, so that in America they are sent by the millions. Amidst all the joy attendant upon both sending and receiving there is often a weariness arising in handwriting the many addresses as well as in hurriedly opening the large stacks of envelopes that come through the mails. Great care must be taken that the greeting card is used for its most joyful and helpful purpose. The spiritual emphasis must be protected with care. The sentiments expressed must be reverent and dignified. They must be a true witness to the faith. Let a prayer accompany each card you send, and friends near and far will be blessed!



THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Transport trucks from the north woods piled high with bundled evergreen trees are among the first harbingers of Christmas during the fall months. The sight of them brings mingled feelings—a certain resentment that Christmas has been made into a "big business" by the mercenary exploiters, and a feeling of joy that the resources of nature can be constantly speaking of the ongoing life in God's created world. In rich variety they come—spruce, fir, pine, red cedar, arbor vitae, and others, reminding the people of God that in the darkness of winter's sleep, life goes on.

The ornaments we add to the tree at Christmas time speak the language of each household. Each one can carry its own story and should be selected not from a conglomeration on a store counter, but after careful thought and with special meaning. In a sentimental way the ornaments are carried from year to year, expressing traditions and life experiences that blend together at Christmas time with rich significance.



THE POINSETTIA

It is appropriate that plants and flowers should have a large place in the Christmas observance. The emerging green of the plant life and the bright colors of the flowers speak of life and joy. Various parts of the Christian world have come to see in their own flowers an association with the season of the glory of the birth of the King.

On the continent of North America the poinsettia has become the more popular of the Christmas plant symbols. It presents a glorious display with its red leaves surrounding the tiny yellow flower. This plant is at its best in midwinter, as though it were grown just for the Savior's birthday. Its colors are the popular Christmas colors. In the form of a star, it is a reminder of the Star of the East that led the Wise Men to the place of the Nativity.

Something About Christmas and Epiphany

A brief story of
their origin and
the various ways
in which they have
been observed through
the centuries

SOMETHING ABOUT CHRISTMAS AND EPIPHANY

Christmas

If one should ask the man on the street, "When is Christmas?" every likelihood is that he would be able to answer, "Why, December twenty-fifth!" And he would be right—for now, and for most of the Christian world. Perhaps no other date on the calendar is awaited with such eager anticipation. Even the little child knows about Christmas, and looks restlessly forward to the great Day.

But the date of Christmas has not always been December twenty-fifth, and this is not the date everywhere today. Then, too, Christmas is not merely one day in the Church Year; it is a holy season, beginning on Christmas Eve and extending through January sixth.

It should be noted that back in ancient history it was not the custom to celebrate the date of birth, but rather the anniversary of the date of death.

It should also be noted that Christmas, the "Christ Mass," which we celebrate, has a fixed date in contrast to the variable of other church festivals, as, for example, Easter.

It may further come as a surprise that Christmas is not the oldest of the church festivals. As a matter of historical fact, the observance of both Epiphany and Easter antedates that of Christmas. Epiphany, January sixth, is some-

times called, "The Old Christmas." According to Armenian historians, there was such feeling about the transference of the date from January sixth to December twenty-fifth that in some places it resulted in rioting and bloodshed. One of the reasons why the Armenians and Syrians clung to January sixth was the danger they saw in the use of a date which had been connected with the pagan practice of sun worship.

Other dates which have been used for the Christmas celebration are November 17, January 19, March 25, and May 9. What is thought to be the earliest identification of December twenty-fifth with the birth of Christ is found in a statement by Theophilus of Antioch (c. 180) to the effect that the Gauls contended that, as they celebrated the birth of the Lord on December twenty-fifth, so they ought to celebrate the Resurrection on March twenty-fifth. The first certain mention of December twenty-fifth as the birthday of Jesus is in the Calendar of Philocalus (354).

Chrysostom, in a sermon preached at Antioch on December twentieth, 386 or 388, says that from the beginning the Feast of Christmas was known in the West from Thrace as far as Cadiz. It seems certain that it originated in the West and spread eastward. As mentioned previously, Epiphany, January sixth, which commemorated the baptism of Jesus, was at first the more important date, because it commemorated the birth in the *spirit* rather than the birth in the *flesh*. But in the latter part of the fourth century the celebration was connected with the Nativity, especially in Syria. By the middle of the fifth century most of the East had adopted December twenty-fifth.

The Sun of Righteousness

It appears that to some degree, and in some countries, the influence for establishing December twenty-fifth as the day of Jesus' birth was the investing of the former Roman Saturnalia, a pagan festival marking the shortest day of

the year, with a Christian content in which Christ, the Sun of Righteousness and the Light of the World, supplanted it. Constantine the Great (d. 337) did much to encourage the acceptance of this date. One of the collects for the early Christmas service speaks of God's having made "this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true light."

In the Scandinavian countries the Christmas celebration supplanted the pagan custom of honoring the god Thor with bonfires and with feasting. The sun worship yielded to the Christian Christ worship. The cross of Christ replaced the hammer of Thor.

In Germany, too, the worship of Thor was older than the Christmas observance, which eventually replaced it. In the same way it can be said that the pagan celebrations were crowded out by the Christmas event, until it has become the most celebrated festival in all the world with a continually growing significance, a process still going on in the remote corners of the earth.

Festivals Taken Over by Church

In general, many heathen festivals were taken over by the church and came in time to be celebrated as high church days. This taking over of the heathen celebrations and investing them with Christian significance was not without its problems and adulterations. This background of merry-making, sometimes gaining unbalanced proportions, may have been the reason why the English Parliament under Cromwell in 1664 forbade the observance of Christmas. During this time church services were forbidden, and work was to go on. We must remember that in Britain December twenty-fifth was a festival called, "Modranecht," ("the mother's night") long before the conversion to Christianity, and for that reason merry-making readily took over, until it brought about the Puritan revolt. In a letter of 1537 the curate of St. Margaret's, England, says that "the people made no more of God than if He had been a Christmas King." The Feast of Christmas was, however, revived by

Charles II, and since then it has been both a church ceremonial and a festival.

As a consequence of Cromwell's edict, the Puritans of Massachusetts had a law that "whoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by the forbearing of labor, fasting, or in any other way, shall be fined five shillings." There are church groups today which do not observe Christmas for vaunted similar reasons, as for instance, Jehovah's Witnesses.

Various Forms of Expression

What has been called "Christmassing"—ways of celebrating the Holy Day—has assumed various forms of expression throughout Christendom. To some degree the pagan customs continue in the Christian era, with the Yule Log and singing, story-telling and feasting, but with the Christian content. On December thirteenth, Lucia Day, imported from Italy, is celebrated in Sweden, and appears to be gaining acceptance. We also note the addition of a Christmas element to the Lucia festival.

The first preparation for the celebration of Christmas in Scandinavia, as in other countries, is thorough house cleaning and scrubbing. This scrubbing may be taken as symbolic of an inner cleansing. Then come the cooking and baking, including such things as: lutfisk, julgröt (porridge in which an almond is hid), wort bread of dark rye flour, apple cake, cookies in the shape of stars and animals, roast goose, Christmas pig, and "doppa i grytan" (bread dipped into rich meat broth), with the entire household, including the servants, participating.

Then everything is in readiness for the great Festival. In some countries at four o'clock in the afternoon the village bell is rung, announcing the period of Christmas peace. Church services are held on Christmas Eve, or on early Christmas morning, or at the regular morning hour of worship. Sunday school programs have been more or less popular in the Protestant churches of America.

Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree was introduced into all the Scandinavian countries from Germany in the nineteenth century, and sometimes it replaced the Yule Log which had been introduced by the Goths and Saxons. The origin of the tree was probably from Mystery Plays, in which a tree, Paradisbaum (tree of Paradise) was used to symbolize the Garden of Eden. After the suppression of these plays, the tree was used in the home, and gradually there evolved the custom of decorating it with cookies, fruit, and eventually, candles. The *lighted* Christmas tree seems to have been Luther's contribution. In many countries the little flags on trees are evidence of the combination of the sacred and secular in the celebration. Evergreens were used because they did not die in the wintertime, and thereby became a symbol of eternal life.

The introduction of the Christmas tree to England was made by Prince Albert of Saxony, husband of Queen Victoria, in 1841. The German immigrants brought the tree custom to the United States, and it was adopted enthusiastically throughout the country. However, the custom of setting up lighted community Christmas trees in public places originated in the United States.

Mistletoe was sacred among British druids, and was believed to have miraculous powers. According to one legend, holly was used for Christ's crown of thorns, and is thus used in a symbolic way for Christmas wreaths. The poinsettia was discovered in Mexico in 1828 by Dr. Joel Robert Poinsett, United States ambassador to Mexico. In central America it is known as the "flower of the holy night."

Gifts

The giving and receiving of gifts is a part of the Christmas celebration in all countries. Often some mythical character is the distributor of the gifts: *Julesven, Jultomte, Nissen, St. Nicholas, Father Christmas, Santa Claus.* Gifts are opened on Christmas Eve, or Christmas Day, following

the family dinner and the reading of the Christmas story. The family often joins hands in a circle and sings and dances around the Christmas tree. During the Christmastide—Christmas Eve to January sixth—there is much sociability. In addition to gifts for the family, extra fodder is given to the cattle, and birds are remembered with sheaves of grain.

Historically, the giving of gifts may have come from the ancient Italian custom called "strenae"—good luck. Gifts of fruits, pastry, confections, and gold were given on New Year's Day. This custom was in time transferred to the Christmas season. Alms boxes for the poor in medieval times were opened by the priest and distribution made. Consequently, the custom arose for servants to visit their superiors with "Christmas boxes," soliciting their annual gift, a custom vividly suggesting the practice of tipping and the Christmas bonus of our day.

As early as 1223, St. Francis in Greccio, Italy, made the Christmas story of interest by bringing into the church real persons and animals to act out the Nativity scene, thereby revitalizing church attendance. The creche as used today may undoubtedly be traced to this practice of St. Francis.

Candles

The adoption of candles for Christmas use may have come from the Jewish feast of the Rededication of the Temple (Hannukah). A candle is placed by the Irish in the center of laurel wreath as their symbol of Christmas. Also from the Irish came the practice of lighted candles in the windows in homes. This came out of the period of religious repression; priests were thus guided to the homes of the faithful. The Irish brought their custom with them to the United States, and this perhaps was the beginning of Christmas lights as decorations in the home and in the community.

The origin of cards and greetings is disputed. However, there is a record of an English artist who at Christmas time

sent out one hundred cards to his friends in 1842. It was Louis Prang, a German immigrant, who brought the custom to the United States in 1875.

The Moravians of Pennsylvania make much of the Christmas crib, called "putz." On Christmas Eve they go "putz" visiting, wearing the costumes of their ancestors. In Slavik countries the children sleep on beds of straw on Christmas Eve, so that they may share Christ's humble birth. Dutch children express the same sentiment by filling their wooden shoes with straw. In warmer countries, such as Brazil, the holiday spirit is revealed in a summer festival, often with flowers, picnic, and fireworks. The Orient, too, uses great displays of fireworks. Oriental Christians love to dramatize the Christmas story, often vying with each other for the honor of impersonating the main characters of the Holy Family.

Melting Pot

The United States is truly a melting pot, drawing from other nations their most interesting and distinctive customs. It should also be remembered that the celebration is not static, new forms being added from time to time. Subsequent to the opposition of the Pilgrims to the celebration of Christmas, there was in the nineteenth century a wave of Irish, German, and Scandinavian immigration, and it was then that new enthusiasm began to spread, and old Christmas traditions were revived. Typical imported celebrations are found in various parts of our country, based on the importations by the immigrants who settled there.

Hymns and Carols

Christmas hymns and carols are known and sung throughout the world. From the early Latin period we have such hymns as, "Of the Father's Love Begotten"; from England, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"; from Denmark, "The Happy Christmas Comes Once More"; from France, "Angels, We Have Heard on High, Singing Sweetly Through

the Night"; from Norway, "I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve"; from Sweden, "All Hail to Thee, O Blessed Morn"; from Germany, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come," and "Silent Night"; from the United States, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Year after year Handel's "Messiah" continues to be sung, and the number of choirs singing it is increasing throughout the Christian world.

Interesting also are the various Christmas greetings. To mention just a few—America: "Merry Christmas"; France: "Joyeux Noel"; Germany: "Fröhliche Weihnachten"; Italy: "Buon Natale"; Norway: "Glädelig Jul"; Sweden: "God Jul." We observe that in all of them the message is a word of good will to men.

Epiphany

Epiphany, sometimes called "The Little Christmas," is a festival older than Christmas. It falls on January sixth, in Swedish called "Trettondedag Jul"—Twelfth Night. The Yuletide as such does not end until January thirteenth, St. Knut's Day. There is a rhyme, "Tjugondedag Knut kör Julen ut" (The twentieth day, Saint Knut's by rule, Does end the festival of Yule).

In Jerusalem, according to the Epistle of Macarius to the Armenians, about 330 A.D., the Feast was kept with zeal and splendor and was, with Easter and Pentecost, a favorite season for baptism. There is evidence that in Spain the long Advent fast was a preparation for the Feast of the Epiphany. The Council of Saragossa, 380 A.D., decreed that from the seventeenth of December to the sixth of January—the Epiphany—the faithful should not dance or make merry, because it was a season of repentance.

Birth and Baptism of Christ

Epiphany commemorated both the birth and baptism of Christ. The date seems to go back to the second century in Asia Minor and Egypt. Like Christmas, Epiphany replaced a pagan festival which had once celebrated the winter solstice. In the West, however, Epiphany is not mentioned until the fourth century.

In the early centuries Epiphany ranked with Easter and Pentecost as one of the three principal festivals of the church. In the Western church it lost its character as a feast of the baptism of Christ, which the Eastern church

has retained to the present day. In the Western church it became associated with the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.

Manifestation

Indeed, Epiphany means manifestation, dawn, theophany. Our emphasis now is on that manifestation to the Gentiles, commemorating the appearance of the Magi, therefore sometimes called the Feast of the Three Kings. The word "epiphanies" (plural) is also used, including such manifestations as, His presence in the Temple at the age of twelve, His glory at Cana, the faith of the centurion, the stilling of the tempest, the raising of Lazarus, the turning of water into wine—all manifesting forth His glory, and showing Him to be the Son of God.

While the Anglicans retained Epiphany among the greater or "red letter" holy days, with a special service appointed before the end of the sixteenth century, the celebration of the day was abolished in some territories, ceasing entirely among the Reformed. Among Lutherans the Festival fell more and more into disuse as unnecessary, or was transferred to the following Sunday, as in Prussia. At present there is much diversity in observance: in some countries the day is still kept as a great festival; in others, a "half-holy day," i.e., a day of purely ritual observance with a church service; in yet others it is not celebrated at all, though the following Sunday is still counted as The Sunday after the Epiphany. The efforts to restore the day are not likely to succeed, because it comes too soon after Christmas, and therefore it is difficult to give it special significance. The Festival suffers because the day has been retained as an ecclesiastical festival without having attached to it any generally acknowledged special great event to be celebrated.

Luther desired that on Epiphany preachers should refer to Christ's baptism and to Christian baptism in general, and he himself preached on that subject. But he was unsuc-

cessful in gaining general acceptance, and the Lutheran Church has retained the story of the visit of the Magi as the Scripture for the day. In the Church Year there are five Sundays after the Epiphany, the number used in any given year being determined by the date of Easter.

Down through the ages the questions have been asked: "Which of these two festivals is the greater?" "Which is of greater significance, Jesus' birth or Jesus' baptism? Jesus' birth according to the flesh or His birth according to the Spirit?" Differing answers have also been given. The answer to be arrived at is that both are important. And thus in the calendar of the Church Year both are included.

Historic Divide

The birth of any child is always of potential significance. Countless children have been born into the world, and are still being born. But the birth of this Child may be called the "historic divide." He was "born a child and yet a King." Christmas speaks of the most profound event of history—the Incarnation—when God came to dwell among men in the person of Jesus Christ. While it is shrouded in mystery in many ways, and passes all human understanding, it is, nevertheless, the greatest fact visible to the eye of faith. So the entire Christian church sings, "Joy to the world! the Lord is come."

Epiphany, furthermore, stands forth as the symbol of His revelation to the Gentiles—of whom we are a part. Therefore we sing,

> "Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
> Dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid;
> Star of the east, the horizon adorning,
> Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid."

These truths remain as a part of the unshakable foundations of our faith, and can sustain us when everything around us seems to crumble. Thus year after year we go

on reading with new appreciation and enthusiasm the ancient words,

> In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. . . . And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, . . . Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him."
>
> Luke 2:1, 6, 7; Matthew 2:1-2

Christmas—the time of Christ! We celebrate the event during certain days and seasons. However, for the Christian it is always the time of Christ. He says, "Christ in me, the hope of glory," and I in Christ day by day and—forever!

Epiphany—His revelation to the Gentiles, now "His grace possessing."

Something About Worship

In the Home

WHILE THE RESOURCES OF THIS BOOK are intended for use on various occasions and in different settings where Christians are assembled, it is likely that their chief contributions will be in the setting of the home, whether at the family altar or in the place of private devotion. The conviction motivating such a use affirms that what happens in the home is more determinative of community and world life than what happens in public, in the church, or at school. These latter are reflections of the state of the home life of the nation; and if there is to be an influence for good, it must originate in the home. This will occur only when parental love, the family altar, and the practice of private devotions are the common practice. These are fundamental to sound family life.

The home altar calls for good order, regularity, and group discipline on the part of all its participants. This materializes only when the family, under the careful and loving leadership of the parents, holds reverently and regularly to a schedule and form that has become a fixed and accepted tradition. Where the custom has become a meaningful one, a real void is felt when even a single day goes by without the moments of blessed fellowship in group devotions. The

pattern of worship may vary from home to home, or even from day to day in a home; yet, it is helpful for each family to establish a form of its own. Care must be exercised however, lest it become a dead routine. The form most effective is the one that facilitates the common expression of the family group in its own peculiar make-up and personality. Special traditions in worship may last through many years, even from one generation to the other. Suggestions from one home to another become mutually helpful. For this reason these few pages are given over to a few thoughts on family worship.

The Church Year

The appropriately structured year of the liturgical churches is not meant to be observed only in the church. Its significance in public observance is best appreciated by those who first recognize it as a part of the life of the Christian home. The family has been termed "the church in miniature." What is experienced religiously in the church, if it is to be deeply rooted, must first be experienced in the home. In this sense the Church Year, with its unfolding message from Advent to Judgment Sunday, with the rising and falling of moods, with its rich variations and nuances, belongs to the family circle. Where it is found in the home, it becomes all the richer in the life of the larger church. The Christian family will be enriched when it gives attention to the changing seasons of the Church Year, and then adopts those helps and forms that are appropriate to the season.

Christmas and Epiphany

In our modern Christian culture only the most "Scrooge-like" and cynical homes will let the Christmas season pass without some special observance. For many the day of the Nativity has taken on a home-centered significance. The day is spent at home in the warmth of the intimate circle, or in a visit with the dearest relatives or friends. It is

adorned with much that is sentimental and rich in the tradition of the particular family. The festival almost always includes the traditional dinner, the exchange of gifts in the free-sharing spirit of the season, usually with each family doing these things in a way all its own, carrying over the customs from year to year. Most homes, even where the religious spirit is neglected through the rest of the year, will find time for the reading of the Christmas story and for the singing of Christmas carols.

That all this might be in the true spirit of Christmas is the Christian's concern. He knows that if the divine Person of the day is to remain central, all secularized and commercialized intrusions must be carefully resisted. The family must sense the meaning of the customary Christmas decorations. The festive activities of eating and celebrating, the giving and receiving of gifts and pleasantries, and all else that makes the day one of happiness, must center around the act of worship and the devotional period.

But Christmas, in the home as well as in the church, is more than a day. It is a season. It begins on Christmas Day or Christmas Eve, not weeks before, as it seems so often to do. It is a tragedy that a secular influence is pushing toward a kind of observance in which Christmas programs, parties, choir concerts, and even public services of worship, precede the actual day of Christmas, so that the Christmas spirit is worn out and the singing of carols has lost its spark even before the festival day has arrived. The preceding season of Advent is for preparation for Christmas, not its fulfillment. Christians do well, for their own enrichment and deepening, not to overlook the unfolding nature of the Church Year.

Christmas begins on Christmas Day and continues on to the Day of the Epiphany. The days following Christmas are significant in the unfolding of the message. The Days of the Martyrs reflect the redemptive character of the season. St. Stephen's Day, the Day of John the Evangelist, and the day of the Holy Innocents add depth to the understanding of the Nativity. Then the celebration moves forward through New

Year's Day, the day of Holy Baptism, and then on to the Day of the Epiphany, representing the bursting forth of the great light of the Incarnation on the Gentile nations. Epiphany Day is the day of the adoration of the Wise Men. It is a day in its own right, and should not be observed specifically before the day has arrived. Often in our observance the two days, Christmas and Epiphany, are confused. It must be remembered that the birth of Jesus and the coming of the Wise Men from the East did not occur on the same night. Therefore the stories of the shepherds and of the Magi should be separated. They do not narrate the same event. There is enough in each to merit a special observance of its own.

It has been suggested that a distinction should be made in the celebrating of the two days. The figures of the Wise Men in decorations for Christmas should not be placed at the manger scene, but rather at some distant point in the house, maybe even in another room, preferably to the east of the manger scene. Then as the season advances they should be moved progressively closer each day, this at the time of the family devotions, so that when Epiphany Day has come, they are immediately at the crib of the child Jesus in the posture of adoration. This type of symbolic expression can add new dimensions to the Christmas observance.

While in times past Epiphany Day has ranked higher than Christmas Day in the observance of the church, in our day it is good to let the two speak in a prolonged and common voice announcing history's greatest event. It is a quiet and soft voice that speaks to the small circle around Bethlehem; it is to the far reaches of the whole world that the heavenly star brings its message of the Bethlehem event. Thus Christmas begins quietly and intimately. The Epiphany picks up its message and carries it out in an expanding circle throughout the world and across the centuries. The appointed lessons for the season do this in effective announcement of the Christ coming to the places where men are in

the common things of life and where they manifest the needs for which Christ came. The central emphasis is always on His coming and the meaning of His coming for the life of man. Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve, the miracle at Cana, His power to heal and to create faith, His power even over the elements of nature, and His power to keep His own—these are revealed in the Epiphany unfolding. Without them the Christmas story is only half told.

The home that orders its devotional life in this seasonal unfolding has found the richer meaning of the Church Year, and has a good beginning toward understanding the gospel in its contribution to the common tasks of life through the rest of the year.

The Family Altar

Where the family follows the wholesome practice of gathering as a unit for daily devotions, it is helpful to recognize the changing spirit of the seasons of the Church Year. The Christmas season, by its nature of being a family season, offers a most appropriate beginning for those families that would establish a good custom for the year; and for those that have recognized Advent by a well-ordered worship practice, Christmas gives the setting for helpful variations. The following is a suggestion for the family that would make Christmas more meaningful in its circle.

1. The lighting of the Christmas candles.
   Where the Advent candles were lighted each day in increasing number, the same candles may be used through the Day of the Epiphany, lighting all of them before the Scripture for the day is read.
2. The Scripture.
   Shall be read by the head of the family or in unison by the members of the family. (See pages 51-229)
3. The Meditation.
   Shall be read by the head of the family, or by members of the family taking their daily turns. The daily messages found in the last portion of this book may be used.

4. The Prayer.
   This may be the appropriate prayer for the day, accompanying the meditation, found on pages 51-229. Or it is well frequently to have free prayers offered.
5. The Lord's Prayer. In unison.
6. The Hymn.
   Christmas carols and other favorite Christmas hymns should be used during the days following Christmas. Several Epiphany hymns too are of the type that can become favorites of the family. Each family should commit to memory for group singing several hymns of this season.
7. The Benediction. In unison.
8. The extinguishing of the candles.

Morning and Evening Prayers

Many families as well as church groups at meetings in the church find it helpful to arrange their devotional period in a more formal pattern, using the suggested orders of the church, for instance, the Morning Suffrages or the Evening Suffrages (found on pages 154 and 155 of the *Service Book and Hymnal* of the Lutheran Church in America). In this case the materials found in the last section of this book will help in the selection of the Scripture; and the meditation may follow the hymn. The following is a shortened form using responses and responsive reading of the Psalm.

1. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
   ℟ Amen.

   Lord, have mercy upon us.
   ℟ Lord, have mercy upon us.

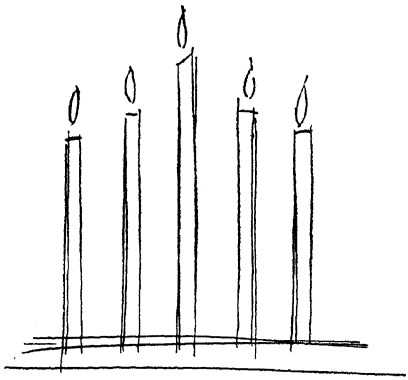
   Christ, have mercy upon us.
   ℟ Christ, have mercy upon us.

   Lord, have mercy upon us.
   ℟ Lord, have mercy upon us.
2. The Lord's Prayer, prayed in unison.

3. The Apostle's Creed, recited in unison.
4. The Psalm, read responsively.
5. The Lesson (see pages 51-229).
6. The Hymn.
7. The Meditation (see pages 51-229).
8. The Prayer.
   The Lord be with you.
   ℟ And with thy spirit.
   The Prayer (see pages 51-229).
9. The Benediction. *(In unison or spoken by the head of the family.)* May the Lord Almighty dispose our days and our deeds in His peace. Amen.

Journey Day by Day Through Christmas and Epiphany

In
Scripture
Meditation
Song
and
Prayer



THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

DAY OF WONDER

THE SCRIPTURE

And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. Luke 2:17-19

This a day of great wonder! On the occasion of the first Christmas celebration those who heard the shepherds' message wondered at the things the shepherds had told them. Christmas has ever been that way, and ever will be; and the Easter hymn, "Day of Wonder, Day of Gladness," fits in also at Christmas time.

As commonly used, the little word "wonder" has two meanings. On the one hand it means "to be doubtful" and on the other "to be filled with awe." Perhaps a little bit of both meanings lingers in the heart of the Christmas celebrant today. What took place in Bethlehem seems quite beyond all human capacity to believe; at the same time it lifts the soul in trustful awesomeness to the heights of heaven.

To those who have their doubts about Christmas, the very beauty of the day can deny its reality. The strangely transforming spirit, when human impulses are at their best, strains the faith. People smiling in holiday mood, radiant in the spirit of love and generosity and forgiveness, offer such a contrast to the usual. Soldiers on the battle field, laying down their weapons for a few hours of quietness in a gesture of peace, constitute a quite different picture from the bloody battle of the previous day, and of the day to follow. "It simply can't be true," the doubter says, "for it is much too beautiful, much too idealistic, much too unreal. Man simply is not like that, and tomorrow he will be back again at his very un-Christmas-like ways. How can the God in heaven permit such a contradiction?"

Yet for others, Christmas day strikes a chord deep at the levels of faith and gives birth to the spirit of holy reverence. Here God's truth is confronted, come to earth in its most appealing dress, and shining in its most awe-inspiring form. When the earth is darkest and most forlorn, the overwhelming brightness of heaven confronts man with the greatest event of human history, when God became man. It overshadows the bursting of an atomic bomb. God has spoken! Christ has come!

Lest we yield to the temptation of making our Christmas too common and prosaic, lest we build ourselves up to a big let-down on the greatest day of the year, let us remind ourselves that we are standing in God's holy presence. In this day let us be glad and rejoice!

A great and mighty wonder
  Our Christmas festal brings;
On earth, a lowly Infant,
  Behold the King of kings!

The Word is made incarnate,
  Descending from on high;
And Cherubim sing anthems
  To shepherds, from the sky.

And we, with them triumphant,
  Repeat the hymn again:
"To God on high be glory,
  And peace on earth, to men!"

From the Greek of Anatolius.

THE PRAYER

O God, who hast made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant, we beseech Thee, that as we have known on earth the mysteries of that Light, we may also come to the fulness of his joys in heaven; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for Christmas Day

ST. STEPHEN, MARTYR

A LOOK INTO HEAVEN

THE SCRIPTURE

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." Acts 7:55-56

This day in the church is designated "The Day of the Martyrs." Offhand, it may seem strange to move so suddenly from the day of the glory and peace and love to the day of persecution and tumult and hatred, from the day of a sweet child in the manger bed to the day of dying men and flowing blood. There seems to exist such an inexplainable gap between yesterday and today.

A clue to the dilemma is found in the words once wisely spoken, "The Christian's Christmas joy is in the privilege of being where the battle is fiercest, in proud consciousness of having been sent to the front." The blood of the martyrs speaks loudly and convincingly to this insight. He who has not seen with the martyrs has not seen the glory of Christmas. The Christmas story, perhaps, is not completely told until the last chapter spoken in the blood of the martyrs has been recited. To understand the story, we do well to stay with it through the final chapter.

Christmas then is not only a look into the stable to see the newborn babe, fresh and sweet, as most newborn babies are. It is also a look into heaven with Stephen, to see Jesus the Lord of the church shining in the glory of the Father. This Jesus it was who went through the humiliation of the Incarnation, from the beauty of birth to the agony of death, from Bethlehem's praises to Calvary's taunts, and from adoration to complete rejection, that He might win the victory that can save man from sin and self. In His heavenly face are the lines of strength and victory, for He has overcome the last enemy, death. A look at the Christ child is meaningful only to those who see in Him the victorious Savior. This was the look of the martyrs!

You say that your look into heaven must await the hour of death? Not so! Though the human inclination is to postpone the glorious sight as long as possible, the gospel announces that heaven's doors are open. Through these open doors the believer comes in confidence to see the vista of

eternity in the face of Jesus Christ. Christmas is a door opening into heaven. Stephen looked into heaven and saw Jesus; the believer looks into the face of Jesus and sees heaven. The shepherds, the Wise Men, and the martyrs lead to seeing both, the face of Jesus and the open door of heaven.

In heaven above, in heaven above,
  God hath a joy prepared,
Which mortal ear hath never heard,
  Nor mortal vision shared,
Which never entered mortal breast,
By mortal lips was ne'er expressed,
  O God the Lord of Hosts!

JOHAN ÅSTROM
Tr. William Maccall

THE PRAYER

Grant us grace, O Lord, that like St. Stephen we may learn to love our enemies, and seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt; through Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

The Third Day of Christmas

ST. JOHN, APOSTLE, EVANGELIST

THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP

THE SCRIPTURE

Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" The saying spread abroad among the brethren that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. John 21:20-24

For the third consecutive day we center our meditation on different personalities of the gospel. Today is the day of John, the Evangelist. The first and central person was the divine Jesus who is the gospel. The second and third are humans who represent the gospel. Are these last two brought into our purview simply to take attention away from Christ, or to thin out the gospel, or possibly to help belittle His divinity and the nature of the gospel? Not at all!

Stephen and John, as symbols of the martyrs and the Apostles, serve us a real purpose. The gospel is not fully understood by our remaining in the posture of worship and adoration. That is too often the meaning of a holy season: we come to the manger and worship; we sing our songs of adoration; we bear gifts;—and then go away to forget what we have seen and heard.

To see Christ and to believe is to go into holy action. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken unto them. The Apostle Peter saw the transfigured Christ and wrote, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty." The evangelist John was with Christ for three years, and said, "This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things." Such is inevitably the impact of Christ; men become His disciples when they see Him; they have a new motivation for life.

As we learned yesterday, the look into the manger becomes also a look into heaven; so we learn today that the look into the manger is also a look into the Christian life. To be an apostle does not demand perfection and faultlessness; it does demand the commitment that leads to discipleship. John, who loved Jesus, and Peter, who became the spokesman of the Apostles, knew their own weaknesses; but they also knew Christ personally, and they desired to witness to Him in disciplined following.

Our special festival of the birth of our Lord may be for

only one day; discipleship worthy of the name carries through every day of the year.

Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
  Of our life's wild, restless sea,
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
  Saying, "Christian, follow Me."

Jesus calls us: by Thy mercies,
  Saviour, may we hear Thy call.
Give our hearts to Thy obedience,
  Serve and love Thee best of all.

CECIL FRANCES ALEXANDER

THE PRAYER

Merciful Lord, we beseech Thee to cast the bright beams of Thy light upon Thy Church; that it, being instructed by the doctrine of Thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John, may so walk in the light of Thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the Day

HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS

THE NAMELESS ONES

THE SCRIPTURE

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men. Matthew 2:13-16

History does not record the names of the male children who were slain by the fury of Herod when he heard of the birth of "the King of the Jews." Nor are we told how many there were of those innocent little ones. They were completely innocent and fully unaware of the wonderful though perplexing things that were taking place in the region of Bethlehem. Yet by being the victims of a despicable spirit of fear and revenge, they were to be emblazoned as among the honored nameless ones of history. It may be best that way, to know neither their names nor number. Then we might miss the point. It is enough to know that in the mysterious ways of God the purpose they served in life went far beyond the achievements of many who can be named.

Stephen and John we know. In addition there is a long historical listing of those whom we can name and count and locate, men and women whose names are engraven as on imperishable tables of stone, because of the witness they have borne. The nameless ones far outnumber those who are known; the forgotten ones who have lived in dedication and sacrifice, or who have died innocently for the sake of righteousness, are many more than those who are remembered. It is regrettable that few people know, or even care, about their forebears of two or three generations back. There is so little concern for family trees and genealogies by the man who is caught up in the immediacies of life. Yet for their day and in their way these forgotten forebears may have given to the world far beyond the contributions of those we remember.

An awful truth of life is that wherever good enters, evil inevitably raises its head to resist. When this happens, the innocent will suffer. This is a stark truth, whether in war or in peace. Surely the Christian's duty and privilege is to help bring in the forces of righteousness in order that evil may find it impossible to work its deadly ways. There is

only one power that can work this work, the gospel of Jesus Christ in the heart of man.

Until the ideal has been realized, however, life must be faced as it is. The innocent ones will continue to suffer; the righteous will continue to be called on to live or to die without thought of having their names preserved for the ages. Most of us will be among the nameless ones; within two or three generations we may be forgotten by our blood descendants and our names forgotten from the family records. We must face this eventuality with the full knowledge that our responsibility is just as great as it is with those whose names will be preserved and praised.

Around the throne of God in heav'n,
  Thousands of children stand;
Children whose sins are all forgiv'n,
  A holy, happy band,
Singing, Glory, Glory, Glory be to God on high!

ANNE HOULDITCH SHEPHERD

THE PRAYER

O God our Father, who by the birth and infancy of Thy Son didst sanctify and bless childhood: We commend to Thy love all children, and beseech Thee to protect them from every hurt and harm, and to lead them to the knowledge of Thyself and the obedience of Thy will; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the Day

CHRISTIAN CHILDHOOD

THE SCRIPTURE

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Luke 2:39-40

God incarnate began His life on earth as a little babe. He followed the ordinary course of nature. His mother had to care for Him in infancy. When there was danger, He was protected by Mary and Joseph.

Jesus was endowed with the heritage of a sound body. Everything the Gospels tell us about Him leads us to such conclusions. Normal physical growth and development should be the heritage of every child. It is a pity that often willful and deliberate sins and failures of parents, or the hindering effects of circumstances, deny the child this blessing.

About Jesus it is further said that He grew strong. Literally, it is said that He grew strong and thoughtful. He "increased in wisdom." Physical well-being is not in itself enough for the child. Children have the inherent right to be nurtured in such a way that they are more than well-fed and well-cared-for animals.

Even mental growth is not enough, though the pride of parents when the children bring home good grades is understandable. Indeed, surrounded as we are by such an interesting and mysterious universe and its exploration, how dare any one be intellectually lazy?

But, above everything else, there is need of spiritual growth. We find such a development in Jesus. He grew "in favor with God." At twelve, when in the Temple, He knew that He was in His Father's house. Later, He could say that the Father's will was His will, and that everything He said and did was an expression of God.

We often do children great injustice when we underestimate their spiritual capacities. As Jesus was "filled with wisdom," so may we, children and adults, pray God for wisdom with the assurance that He will give it, if we ask in faith. There is a great difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is man made, but wisdom is heaven born. Knowledge is human, but wisdom is divine. Knowl-

edge is man's effort, but wisdom is God's gift. Knowledge may be given to perverted and devilish ends, but wisdom can never be.

Jesus was filled with wisdom. He studied and pondered the sacred writings. He loved the house of God and worship. He communicated with the heavenly Father in prayer. This is also the heritage that God wishes for all of us.

Shepherd of tender youth,
Guiding in love and truth
  Through devious ways,
Christ, our triumphant King,
We come Thy name to sing;
Hither Thy children bring
  Tributes of praise.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA
Tr. *Henry Martyn Dexter*

THE PRAYER

Dear God, we thank Thee that we may call Thee Father, and that this relationship means that "we may call upon [Thee] with all cheerfulness and confidence, even as beloved children entreat their affectionate parents." Keep us always children in faith and obedience. In the name of Jesus, the friend of children. Amen.

CHRIST MAKES US CHILDREN OF GOD

THE SCRIPTURE

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir. Galatians 4:4-7

When we were brought to the Lord in Holy Baptism, we were made the children of God. Believing parents arranged for our baptism. Sponsors stood at our side and promised to take the place of our parents, if they died before we were of age. Many of us have recollections of godparents who took a vital interest in us when we were children and on, as long as they lived.

Christ instituted Holy Baptism. While on earth, He had placed His hand on people in benediction. Now He extends that blessing upon us through the church and its ministry, so that as the pastor lifts his hand over us in the baptismal benediction, Christ is doing it through him. How grateful we should be to accept that grace of God!

Children of God! This is the refrain that should ring in our souls day by day, and under all circumstances. We have been made free from the curse of the law. The rich heritage that God has in store for His children has become ours, ours because God in His great love toward us sent His Son to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons.

For many of us there may have been periods in life when it has been difficult to feel this sonship. Perhaps we have permitted doubt and uncertainty to blur the reality of our sonship. Perhaps we have strayed from the Father's house in sin, and away in that wasteland it has been impossible to say, "Abba! Father!"

Then it is a wonderful truth to know that God is waiting for our return, that His covenant stands sure, and that He is eager to welcome us back. This is a moment when the invitation of God is renewed. We may look deep into our hearts to see if there is anything that is making our filial relationship difficult, if not impossible, and pray to God that He will remove it.

But we still live in a world of sin, where Satan, the "world," and our own flesh require that we remain on con-

stant guard, and ask God to preserve us in the true faith and keep us in the covenant of Holy Baptism. We may remember the word which assures us, "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

As God's children, we may rejoice in looking forward to the day when, with eyes freed from earth's dimness, we shall see God, and say with all the saints in the glory of heaven, "Abba! Father!"

Children of the heavenly Father
Safely in His bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given.

CAROLINE V. SANDELL BERG
Tr. *Ernest William Olson*

THE PRAYER

Dear God, we thank Thee for Thy great love to us, and for sending Jesus to be our Savior and Friend. We come to Thee in childlike trust and confidence, and pray that Thou wilt make us faithful and good children who desire to do Thy holy and perfect will. Help us in faith to hold firmly to thy Fatherly hand, until Thou shalt take us to our true and eternal home. In Jesus' name. Amen.

GOD IS OUR REFUGE

THE SCRIPTURE

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us

Psalm 62:5-8

With all our efforts at providing comfort and shelter, there is still no real protection on earth against sickness, accident, and destruction. We are still looking for the shelter that can really provide security. We need something we can lean on. And men try it in various ways. Some trust in their own strength. "See what I have done. See how smart and strong I am," they say, in attitude if not in word. Some trust in their wealth. They point to their farms, or their apartments, or their stocks and say, "See, all is mine." Others point to their power. Many an ancient clay tablet fairly reeks with the self-praise of monarchs, as they tell of their exploits and their victories. There are empires today that are built on confidence in power.

But above and beyond all such efforts at power and security, we still need something to lean on, something that will really prove a shelter and a refuge. As Søren Kierkegaard says, we need something to which we can cling when all else around us fails. We need something more than that which in the final analysis is nothing but dust. We must have something that can satisfy the deep hunger of the immortal soul. We cry out for it and, as Augustine cried out long ago, we are restless for it until we find it.

That refuge is to be found in God, the Creator and Sustainer, the Redeemer and Friend. This is what the psalmist sees as he speaks of God as a rock and a refuge. The Psalms are a mirror of the soul, reflecting the spiritual experiences of men. They present immediacy in spiritual life. There is no argument or reasoning, but a direct apprehension of God in His greatness, glory, and goodness.

Such a psalm is the one before us. It is important to follow the psalmist's words. He says that his hope is from God. God is his rock, salvation, and fortress. Therefore he will trust in God at all times, and therefore he admonishes us to put our trust in Him. The confidence expressed by the psalmist reaches its climax in the words, "In God I

trust without a fear. What can man do to me?" It is faith in the promises of God that always has supplied the hope, the courage, and the endurance to carry on in His name to the end of life. It sustained men like Paul, and St. Francis, and Livingstone. It has done so in our day in the lives of men like Hanns Lilje and Eivind Berggrav. We can learn from those who have lived on the brink of danger from day to day, and have found their strength in God.

So may we trust in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and take courage. We may say from day to day, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

I know not where His islands lift
  Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
  Beyond His love and care.

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

THE PRAYER

We thank Thee, our Father, that even as we cannot hide from Thee, so Thou wilt not hide Thyself from us. We thank Thee for the ancient promise, "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Put those strong arms around us, as we place our trust in Thee. In Jesus' name. Amen.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

THE MEANING OF A NAME

THE SCRIPTURE

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Luke 2:21

Parents enter into an exciting experience in choosing a name for a newborn babe. Hours are spent in deliberation; name lists are scanned; family records are reviewed; a favorite character in a story may come to memory; a meaningful person of history is recalled; a dear friend is remembered. The name chosen may carry meaning, sometimes clearly known and defined, sometimes hidden in the depths of the unconscious. It may express a hope for the future of the child, or a past frustration and disappointment in the life of the parents; or it may be a dream, a vicarious hope, or a thwarted ambition; it may be a beautiful sound or a tender feeling. Happiness comes later, or disappointment, when the child in adult life lives up to his name, or fails to do so.

An interesting, though sometimes disillusioning, exercise is that of searching out what was back of the name of each one in the family, and to examine how appropriately the name has been lived up to.

There was no question in the minds of Mary and Joseph as to the naming of the child that had come to bless their circle of love. The name was given from heaven. An angel had spoken "you shall call his name Jesus." In willing obedience, though perhaps without full understanding of what was happening, Mary and Joseph obeyed. Theirs was not to be the concern or the privilege of choosing the name; for He was not just another child among men. His name was to be more than a reflection of the feelings, hopes, and loves of human parents. His name was to capture the whole movement of God entering among men through the Incarnation. He was to be called "Jesus," for it was He who was to "save his people from their sins." And Jesus alone, because He was divine among men, has lived up fully to the name given to Him.

It isn't strange that most people have hesitated to use the name Jesus in naming their children. It is too great a name

for man to bear. It does not fit the very sinner whom Jesus came to save.

You wonder why we think of His name in the very first day of the year? Simply because it is in the name of Jesus that life begins and continues and comes to an end for the Christian believer. His is the one name most appropriately given and most appropriately lived. Because of Him and through His name we venture into this new year in confidence!

Jesus, Name of wondrous love,
Name all other names above!
Unto which must every knee
  Bow in deep humility.

Jesus, Name of wondrous love!
Human Name of God above;
  Pleading only this we flee,
Helpless, O our God, to Thee.

WILLIAM WALSHAM HOW

THE PRAYER

O Lord God, who, for our sakes, hast made Thy blessed Son our Savior subject to the Law, and caused Him to endure the circumcision of the flesh: Grant us the true circumcision of the spirit, that our hearts may be pure from all sinful desires and lusts; through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen. Collect for New Year's Day

THE CHRISTIAN'S COMMON DRESS

THE SCRIPTURE

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Gal. 3:25-29

Modern civilized man is supremely preoccupied with the clothing he wears. His concerns are centered around fashions and styling. He asks, "What are they wearing this year?" "What do the fashion experts say?" "What will make me appear most attractive?" "What will my choice in clothing do to my social status?" Both men and women find these questions a grist for conversation.

This may all be an indictment of the modern scale of values; but it also remains that the clothing we wear is a commentary on what we are. It reveals so many things—what we are among men and even who we are, what we place first in our daily concern, our economic status, our occupation or vocation, our activity at the present moment. All these and much more we can read into the apparel that is worn on the body. Surely one must give attention to matters of dress. There is nothing more ludicrous than clothing that is unbecoming the person or the occasion; there are few things more repelling than poorly chosen dress. Let each person learn to dress appropriately to his person and station in life, to his occupation and present activity, and to his means. This is surely a Christian concern!

The New Testament suggests the appearance that is natural for the Christian. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ," the Apostle has said. This reminds us of the immortal lines of Edward Mote, "Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne." The reference obviously is to the deep change that comes in the inner person, a change by which God recognizes not the sinner but the righteousness of Christ that encompasses the sinner. It is a garb that is to be seen outwardly as well as inwardly. Faith dresses the believer to be seen by God and also by men. It is not something to put on and take off according to the occasion. The pity is that the Christian world has led many to

assume the Christian life to be meant only for selected occasions.

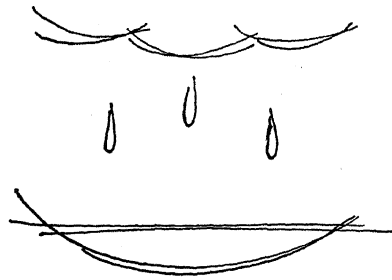
There is a uniqueness about the Christian dress. Quite unlike the changing fashions it remains constant. It comes at the moment of becoming a Christian. "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Baptism is not only the receiving of a new life, but also a new appearance before God and men. The appearance of righteousness in all genuineness and honesty, is the dress that is common to all Christians. It is their common identification.

When He shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in Him be found,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne!

EDWARD MOTE

THE PRAYER

Thou God of all purity and righteousness, we come to Thee in all the unattractiveness of our own unrighteousness, thanking Thee for the coming of Jesus Christ into our midst. Thou hast sent Him to take our place upon the Cross; through Him we are covered with a new righteousness that makes us fit for Thy presence. In this righteousness we stand before the world that the world may see Christ in us and turn to Him to be reclothed in the new garb of His holy appearance. Give us boldness to confront the world for Him. Amen.



FAITHFUL TO THE SACRAMENTS

THE SCRIPTURE

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus is it fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. Matthew 3:13-15

God has chosen to speak to man through symbolic action! This is because it is one of man's most effective ways for communication. Through symbols he understands what another person wishes to communicate to him; similarly he makes his own thoughts and intentions known to the other. A wave of the hand or a handshake speak of friendship; the shaking of a fist shows anger and enmity. An academic garb at graduation time, an act of dedication, a picture, the observance of a birthday—these and a host of other symbolic actions come to mind out of daily experience. We do well to pause before every gesture and every symbol lest we lose out on what is being said.

God's two most symbolic actions are those of the Holy Sacraments. Because these sacraments speak and act significantly in God's redemptive action, they have become the forms by which God not only speaks words to which we must listen, but by which also He effects the saving powers that He alone can work. It has been clear from the very time of their institution that these, the Sacraments, transcend all human action. In them God is daily giving His church the forms without which the church cannot be the church, and to Christians the forms without which man cannot enter into the new life in Christ or grow in the nurture of his faith-relationships. At the beginning of the year it is good for the Christian to review and re-establish his reverent regard for God's continuing action in the Sacraments.

The example of Jesus is our object lesson today. He came to the Jordan one day to be baptized by John. John would have prevented Him, but Jesus said, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." How much our theologians would rejoice today, had Jesus entered into a careful theological explanation of the meaning of baptism! It would have made it so easy, they might think, to fit baptism into a systematic scheme of doc-

trine and definition. But such was not the intention of our Lord. His purpose was only to institute forms by which a real encounter of personal relationship between man and God might be effected.

We should not suppose that we will ever be able to be intellectually clear as to the meaning of the Sacraments; though certainly we owe it to our growth to come to mature and adequate understandings. Of one thing we must be more than crystal clear, God is acting in the Sacraments. They are not to be minimized. They call for faithful use on our part.

Arise and be baptized,
  And wash thy sins away;
Thy league with God be solemnized,
  Thy faith confessed today.

No more thine own, but Christ's;
  With all the saints of old,
Apostles, seers, evangelists,
  And martyr throngs enrolled.

EDWARD HENRY BICKERSTETH

THE PRAYER

O Christ, who hast given to the church the Holy Sacraments that through them Thou mightest work Thy redeeming power, Thou didst not find it beneath Thine own position to dwell among men and to conform to the holy practice of Baptism; we pray Thee to sustain Thy church that the Sacraments might be preserved to work Thy holy action among men. May we be faithful and unashamed as we come to the font and kneel at the Holy Table. Amen.

THE GRACE OF GOD IS NEW EVERY MORNING

THE SCRIPTURE

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is thy faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."
The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.

Lamentations 3:22-26

The words for our meditation are like a twinkling star that shines through the blackness of a sky overcast with thick clouds. The writer of Lamentations has bewailed his lot. He feels that he is under the wrath of God who has brought him "into darkness without any light." He is acquainted with bitterness and tribulation, so that he "dwells in darkness like the dead of long ago."

He has the sense of being chained, so that he cries for help and his prayers are still of no avail. He has become a laughingstock. He strikes the bottom of despair in the words, "I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, 'Gone is my glory, and my expectation from the Lord.'" Here is the wailing of one in the depths of despair for whom there seems to be no way out of his anguish.

We have all shared that feeling. We have felt lonely in a cruel world, and have longed for God to help us out of the trouble.

But the clouds break, and the stars shine! The writer says: "But I call this to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness." It is in this remembering that he can declare: "The Lord is my portion, . . . therefore I will hope in him." And again, "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

Through the bitter cry of wailing comes a triumphant song of the experienced assurance of God's grace. Enhanced by the dark background in which it is set, this crystal-clear gem of faith sparkles with a luster that dispels the gloom. And what a glorious truth it radiates! When we come to our senses, no matter how difficult our experiences, and remember God, we recognize it, too. We understand something of the victorious spirit of the dauntless Paul, as he exclaims, "For I have learned, in whatever

state I am, to be content." On the night before a major operation, a parishioner testified, "Without God, we are nothing, we have nothing. I have experienced His protecting power so often." This is what will happen to each one of us when we look in true faith to Him in whom we live. The star, gleaming through the rent cloud, eventually gives way to the full and glorious light of the Sun of Righteousness.

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."

"K" in Rippon's selections

THE PRAYER

O God, who givest power to the faint, and increasest strength to him who has no might, help us always to remember that Thou art our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Grant to us also to remember that, though weeping may tarry for the night, joy comes with the morning. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

THE LORD IS OUR KEEPER

THE SCRIPTURE

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved,
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade
on your right hand.
The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for evermore.

Psalm 121

Our psalmist looks up to the One who is his keeper, his shade from the smiting heat of the sun and from the harmful effects of the moon as they could be experienced in the land in which he lived. Six times the thought of God's protecting care returns to his mind, and he has in his soul the assurance that the blessing of that protection is to be found in quietness and confidence.

He lifts up his eyes to the hills—or mountains. We do not know where he lived when he wrote this psalm, but perhaps it was near the hills of Jerusalem, for in another psalm we read, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from this time forth and for evermore."

But there can be no doubt that he thinks of them in their symbolic meaning, as signifying that which is exalted and exalting, and in the final analysis—God. At any rate, he knows that his help comes from God, and that God is the mighty and eternal One, the maker of heaven and earth. In God he is always secure, because God neither slumbers nor sleeps. God's watchful eye, which is ever on the sparrow, is upon His children day and night. How wonderful it would be for us, if we would always remember this truth! How many sleepless nights could be averted, if we would say to ourselves that, since God keeps His all-seeing and ever-watchful eye upon us, it is both needless and faithless to spend our time in worry or fear.

A pastor in calling on a patient in a hospital observed that she had before her a meditation on verse 4 of the Fourth Psalm: "Commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent." She said: "It seems that that meditation was meant just for me." And it was! God's Word is meant for you and for me. We can make it our very own, taking it into our own hearts and lives. If we do, we shall, at least in a measure, and in time a growing measure, be able to say with the psalmist: "In peace I will both lay me

down and sleep; for thou alone, O Lord, makest me dwell in safety."

We are now in a new year. We face another year with its uncertainties and its challenges. Bombs may burst, and suffering may come. We do not know what any new day may have in store. But, with our eyes lifted to the hills of God, we can be certain that "the Lord will keep [our] going out and [our] coming in from this time forth and for evermore."

Mine eyes unto the mountains
  I lift, whence help goes forth;
My help comes from Jehovah,
  Maker of heav'n and earth.
Thy foot shall never falter;
  Thy every step He keeps;
The Lord who keepeth Israel,
  He slumbers not, nor sleeps.

ERNST WILLIAM OLSON

THE PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, grant that we may ever lift eyes of faith unto Thy holy hills. May our stay ever be found in Thee, whatever the day may bring forth. Into Thy loving hands do we commend our souls. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WHEN THE STAR GUIDES

THE SCRIPTURE

When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Matthew 2:9-12

Our hearts go out in pity for the man or the woman who is not led by a star. We can only feel sympathy with the person who is not captivated by something greater than himself. For such a person life is destined to bog down, because it has nothing to keep it on a high level of achievement.

It takes the guidance of a star to keep us at our best physically.

Similarly, it takes the guidance of a star to keep us alert mentally. This is not an easy task when others sing for us, read and review books for us, and when radio and television bring us the latest news. It will be good for us to determine now, at the beginning of the year, that before its end there are certain books that we must read.

It takes the guidance of a star to keep us faithful to our task. It will make a tremendous difference to the spirit in which we perform our daily tasks whether we feel that we are working for so much an hour, for the laying of so many bricks, or for the building of a cathedral. Some years ago one of our church papers related the story of a man who had come to America as a young boy and by ability, industry, and honesty earned the reputation of having built a city. He earned the title because he thought not primarily about what he could get out of it, but of what he could put into it.

It takes the guidance of a star to keep us faithful to the high things of life. When our ideals are gone, our life tends to sink below the level of the beast. When Goethe was writing *Iphigenie,* he went to stand before Raphael's St. Agatha in Cologne. There he determined that he would read his *Iphigenie* to St. Agatha, and that his heroine should say nothing that the saint might not utter.

All of this reaches its culmination in the truth that it takes the guidance of a star to lead us in our devotion to God. The Wise Men from the East were students of the skies. They also knew something of the prophets of the Old

Testament. Thus, when the star of Bethlehem appeared, they knew that it signified the advent of something great. So they set out, guided by that star, to find and worship the newborn king. That star, moreover, is still inviting us to Christ, our Savior and Guide.

At Dar-es-Salaam lies buried our pioneer missionary to Africa, Ralph D. Hult. From his early days in high school he had but one ambition—to be a missionary in Africa, and especially in the Sudan. He did not live to labor many years in the land he loved so dearly. But achievement is not measured by years, and already we know that he accomplished a pioneer work which in time will bring increasing harvest. Our life, however humble and obscure it may seem to be, is never in vain, if it is guided by the Star of Bethlehem!

O Thou, who by a star didst guide
  The Wise Men on their way,
Until it came and stood beside
  The place where Jesus lay:
Although by stars Thou dost not lead
  Thy servants now below,
Thy Holy Spirit, when they need,
  Will show them how to go.

JOHN MASON NEALE

THE PRAYER

O God, who by a star didst lead the Gentiles to Thine only-begotten Son, mercifully grant that we who know Thee now by faith may be guided through life to behold Thy glory in heaven; through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the Day of the Epiphany

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

THE SCRIPTURE

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Lift up your eyes round about, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far,
and your daughters shall be carried in the arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant,
your heart shall thrill and rejoice;
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Isaiah 60:1-6

* This and the following six meditations are prepared for the days intervening between Epiphany Day and the First Sunday after the Epiphany. On that Sunday the meditation on p. 115 should be used and followed in order with the meditations for the week following.

"The future glory of the Lord"—this may well comprise the thought of our Scripture lesson for today. God's glory revealed is the message of Epiphany. On Mount Sinai God revealed His glory. To the prophets He further revealed it. "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."

Our prophet has seen the darkness that shall cover the earth. Here is indeed a picture of life as it has been recorded through the ages, a picture which seems to be aggravated at this very time. There are clashes of men's minds and wills. There is the selfishness which wants its own way, no matter what that way may involve for others.

But through the darkness will shine the light of the presence of the Lord, and His glory will be seen in redemption, light, and righteousness. The visit of the Wise Men who sought out the newborn King to worship Him and bring their treasures is an earnest of what is to come to pass.

Perhaps today we are tempted to ask, "What does this vision of Isaiah actually mean?" We are today beholding how entire nations which once knew and worshiped God have turned away from Him, and are denying His very existence. What is the prophet's vision more than a mere mirage, a figment of a spiritually-intoxicated imagination? We cannot deny the pressure of such questions. We see how the powers of evil prevail. We know, further, that deep within our own soul there is a constant battle between the good and the evil.

But then our thought may turn to God. He is the creator and sustainer. He reveals himself in good will and love. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." He sent Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus has revealed the heart and will of God. Love and good will are eternal. Evil carries within it the seed of eventual destruction.

In the presence of God is light. We hear reports of that light breaking through near and far: in India, in China, in Formosa, in the islands of the seas; and with it trails of God's glory. While there is pessimism in the world and its literature, the church sings, "A mighty fortress is our God," "Thine is the glory, Risen, conquering Son."

God's scepter is a scepter of righteousness and love. He will gather His own to himself. If we are His in faith and obedience, we may confidently look to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. From that city His glory will shine forth resplendent, and there we shall worship Him for ever and ever. And each one of us may sing, "That will be glory for me!"

> Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
> Doth his successive journeys run;
> His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
> Till moons shall wax and wane no more.
>
> ISAAC WATTS

THE PRAYER

Almighty and Eternal God, who also art known in love and justice, we pray that our confidence in Thy power and love may never grow dim. Keep us ever radiant with the assurance that Thou art at our side. Through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

FOLLOWING THE LIGHT

THE SCRIPTURE

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

It is hard to understand why some of our neighbors seemed so anxious to turn off their Christmas lights. Here it is only two days after the Epiphany and fourteen days after Christmas, and the streets seem so dark in comparison with what they were during the height of celebration. The decorations were expensive and elaborate, and they added so much cheer amid the drabness of the winter. The lights were brilliant and beautiful; they were colorful reminders in the hour of winter darkness. But now they have disappeared. We would have loved so much to have seen all of them remain a while longer.

What does this haste mean? Does it mean that men really love darkness more than the light? Or that the dazzling glory of the Son of Man was too much for them? Or perhaps that they really did not see the true light of Christmas that shone so gloriously, and which is still shining, if only they could see it?

Only God knows the answer! One thing we can be sure of is that there is a lesson to be taught in keeping our Christmas lights aglow for a few more days. It is not enough just to see the light for a moment, and then go away and forget it, as some do. The divine light must not be treated that way, for it is not a light that comes and goes. It is a light that stretches consistently across the centuries, so that even with a prolonged Christmas season our lights are but a tiny flicker against the persistent light of God's love.

The divine Light is made to be followed. In this sense our ornamental lights are inadequate. They are stationary, they do not move; they are not meant to be followed, they only point the way. The Wise Men from the East followed the moving star until it came to where the Christ child lay. It brought them to Him who in turn was to be the light of the world alongside of which the heavenly star seemed to be dim.

Christ came into the world to save. It is quite impossible

to appropriate His salvation without realizing that to receive Him is also to follow Him. To follow Him is to have the light of life; not to follow Him is to walk in darkness. Surely the world is divided into two camps, those who follow Him and those who do not. As a reminder to ourselves who are in the light, and as a testimony to those who are not in the light, we do well to celebrate the "Feast of Lights" as a token of the truth that the real lights of Christmas will never be turned off.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
  "I am this dark world's light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
  And all thy day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
  In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that Light of life I'll walk,
  Till traveling days are done.

HORATIUS BONAR

THE PRAYER

Thou God, who lightest the heavens with the sun by day and the stars and the moon by night, who in Christ didst light the pathway that leads through the darkness of time into the brightness of eternity, continue the light of the gospel to lead the peoples of the world from the ways of evil and gloom into the ways of good and glory. Through Jesus Christ who is the light of the world.

Amen.

REFLECTING THE GLORY

THE SCRIPTURE

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

What is meant by the "veiled gospel" of which the Apostle speaks? Why was it veiled, and how was it veiled? These questions are quite beyond the full understanding and explanation of the human mind, for the simple reason that it is just in the human mind that the "veil" is found. God's mind is far above man's mind, as though a cloud hangs between; and man cannot see through into the splendor of God. God's being is majestic and glorious in beauty far beyond man's comprehension; man's eyes are dim and his mind is beclouded in the comprehending of God. The veil is not of God's deliberate making; it is of man's making, a condition that arose in the Fall when man became weakened in understanding and knowing God and the things of God. The unbelieving mind of man lacks the capacity to see the full light of God's revelation.

The Apostle tells us that "the gospel is veiled only to those who are perishing." This means that to those who have received Christ there is a removing of the covering that has kept them from seeing. It also means that the fullness of the glory of the gospel does not break in all at once on the mind of the new believer. It is too much for his weakened eyes unprepared for heavenly sights. For this reason we can see around us in the Christian community those who have more sensitivity to see the gospel glory, and also those whose eyes are in the first stages of seeing. The gospel, we may say, is always in the process of unveiling to human eyes as they grow stronger and stronger to comprehend the heavenly light. It is the daily concern of the believer, therefore, to grow stronger in his ability to see the gospel in its fuller brightness.

This brings the added responsibility on the Christian to reflect the gospel to all the world. He does not rest satisfied in having a veiled gospel among the nations. Day by day, in troubled times, the more mankind lives in the confused

spirit of hatred and misunderstanding, the more the Christian hopes and fervently prays that the light of Jesus Christ might be flashed upon the eyes of the world. To unveil the gospel to a blind world is the Christian's given task.

This task calls for active response, not for quietism and wishful thinking. It calls for a clear witness to the Word of life. It is not a telling of the virtues of the Christian believer, for the believer has nothing of himself to proclaim. It is the reflecting of the glory of God, not in ourselves, but in the face of Jesus Christ. We continue therefore to preach Jesus Christ as the reflection of the divine. Any glory reflected through us is His glory. This reflecting on our part is an unveiling of the gospel to the minds of men.

Glory to the Father give,
God in whom we move and live;
Children's prayers He deigns to hear,
Children's songs delight His ear.

Glory to the Son we bring,
Christ our Prophet, Priest, and King:
Children, raise your sweetest strain
To the Lamb, for He was slain.

Glory to the Holy Ghost,
Who reclaims the sinner lost;
Children's minds may He inspire,
Touch their tongues with holy fire.

JAMES MONTGOMERY

THE PRAYER

Our God in heaven, Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Thou didst in all wisdom and love choose to let the brightness of heaven come into the world in the face of Jesus Christ; in His name we pray that we might this day and every day be used to reflect the light of heaven to all men, that they might see Thy glory and become members of Thy kingdom.

Amen.

THE HOPE OF THE NATIONS

THE SCRIPTURE

"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
He will not wrangle or cry aloud,
nor will any one hear his voice in the streets;
He will not break a bruised reed
or quench a smoldering wick,
till he brings justice to victory;
and in his name will the Gentiles hope."

Matthew 12:18-21

The gospel speaks to man at the two extreme poles of human experience. On the one hand, it addresses the individual man who in the loneliness of his own existence yearns to discover the meaning of life and of eternity. On the other hand, it has a message for man living in the collective body of the nations, where there is a constant reminder that man cannot live alone; it is a reminder that meanings for life must be found in the context of man living with man in the larger segments of society. To understand the gospel, it becomes so necessary to have this twofold perspective.

The gospel approach has not been understood in the same way by the nations of the world. To them the message of the gospel isn't so quickly recognized as being relevant. The nation seems to put itself into a different category from the individual when it comes to the Christian message. The gospel isn't meant for the nation, it seems to say; it is altogether a private matter. It is a common sin of nationalism that complacency and self-righteousness luxuriate to dimensions that are never permitted in the life of the individual. The nation comes first, we are told, right or wrong; the nation is supreme. Such is the root of the troubles of the nations that make it seemingly impossible for them to know how to live together.

The middle decades of the twentieth century witness an incredible lack of confidence and trust on the international scene. Stubbornness and pride on all sides have brought failure in the attempts of skilled and well-intentioned diplomacy; cold wars and threats of hot war are a part of daily conversation; summit conferences seem only to aggravate the problems and increase the gulf that exists between the nations. When will the savior come, is a constant cry, who can bring some semblance of hope to a troubled world?

If only we would listen! The Savior has come! He came long ago at Bethlehem! News of His coming spread across the nations through the Wise Men who had come from the

East. They had seen His star, and they were led to the place where they found Him in person. The news they brought of Him is the same news that has spread now over all the earth. How presumptuous, someone says, to claim that this Christ is the hope of the world! Not so! Until Christ has been received into the heart of the world and permitted to work through transformed hearts, it is presumptuous to suggest that He is not the hope of the world.

Christians have the assurance that the same Christ who has brought them together into a community of trust, can also bring the hearts of the nations together in a world of faith and understanding,

> God of mercy, bid the terrors
> Of inhuman strife to cease;
> Overrule our grievous errors
> By Thy scepter, Prince of Peace.
> Let Thine angels speak again,
> "Peace on earth, good will toward men."

ERNST W. OLSON

THE PRAYER

O God, Thou who alone canst create order out of chaos, watch over this troubled world that it may become a new creation in righteousness, that love may prevail among men and peace among the nations; through Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PEACE AMONG THE NATIONS

THE SCRIPTURE

It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
and many peoples shall come, and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah 2:2-4

It sounds like a reckless prediction! Even to harbor the thought of the possibility that "nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more," sounds like the thinking of a thin-brained idealist! Hasn't history taught its plain lessons? Haven't wars always been? And won't they always be? If we are to survive, isn't it realistic that we must be ready for bigger and better wars, even to the point of being ready to strike the first blow with whatever weapon may be the handiest and deadliest?

This isn't the talk of a warmonger! It is the kind of thing we hear wherever men meet to consider the affairs of nations. Statements like these are spoken by Christians as well as by non-Christians. Such talk doesn't seem to allow any hope for the realization of the promise of Scripture spoken by the Old Testament prophet or for the fulfillment of the Christmas prophecy of "peace on earth." Sad to say, this kind of talk is found too among the followers of the Prince of Peace.

The words of the prophets are so very plain, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." Let the Christian come to earnest grips with these words before he gives up in despair when small conflagrations all over the world give promise of bursting suddenly into another world war. The Christian does well to reckon with God's promise as though it might come to realization in our own generation. Peace cannot be thought of for future generations unless it is accepted as possible for the present generation. The more we count short the promises of God, the less hope will there be of the kind of world that is shaped in the spirit and purpose of Christ's coming as the Prince of Peace.

Man always works for war with more earnestness and cleverness than he works for peace. It has ever been true that during peace nations are preparing for war, while dur-

ing war they forget to work for peace. When war bursts out, man seems to know how to handle it. When peace comes, he scarcely knows what to do. He seems to be born for war rather than for peace.

The gospel is the first message to proclaim that peace has entered in between man and God. It follows that in this gospel, where man is at peace with God, he comes also to be at peace with his fellow man. If, then, between man and man, there can also be peace between men and men who are gathered in the community of nations. The gospel is and always will be the only power for peace among the nations. The Christian reality is this that the gospel keeps the believer optimistic of the most desirable prospect even in the face of the most disparaging realities.

O God of love, O King of peace,
Make wars throughout the world to cease;
The wrath of sinful man restrain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.

Where saints and angels dwell above,
All hearts are knit in holy love;
O bind us in that heavenly chain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.

HENRY WILLIAMS BAKER

THE PRAYER

O Lord, our God, in whom we have our hope and our being: let the peace of heaven dwell within the hearts of men, that the nations may come to hold Thee in their hearts and to live by Thy Spirit in their dealing with one another. In Jesus' name. Amen.

WHENCE COME THESE WONDERS?

THE SCRIPTURE

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . . And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 Peter 1:16, 19-21

Whence come these wonderful things we have been observing and experiencing during a holy season so glowingly tinged with the spirit of heaven? The songs from angelic voices, and the response of the shepherds? The star in the sky, and the long journey of the Magi? The offering of rich gifts to a lowly babe in a simple manger crib in Bethlehem? We do not ask, "How have these been preserved for our annual Christmas re-enactments?" But rather, "How did they come in the first place?"

Or the marvelous change that takes place in the human spirit at Christmas time. Whence does it come? It is like a miracle that such softness and kindness and happiness can enter into the heart of man! Surely not by the impulse of man, or it would show throughout the year and over all the earth! What about the transforming power in the church and the Christian community? Surely it has not come by the power of man, or it would exist in the lives of all men and all nations. Or the Word of God, the Holy Bible, which holds forth throughout the centuries as the "only infallible rule for faith and practice" in the matters of faith and life? Surely not from the minds of men, for then men of all nations, and generations, and perhaps of all levels of knowledge and understanding, would have had it long before the arrival of prophets and apostles and evangelists.

Peter, the spokesman of the disciples, must have been asked similar questions concerning the revelation of the gospel which he so gloriously and assuredly preached. The skeptics seem to have said, "You have cleverly devised these things out of your own minds; they are myths that you try to foist on us." The skeptic is always with us, and today he lifts his head to ask leading questions about the things we have depended upon in our seasonal observance. "The Christ whom you pretend to honor—He is a myth skillfully devised. The written word which carries the story,

it is a neat piece of fiction." Such taunts will confront the Christian in every generation.

Peter's forthright answer is the answer of every believer. "We did not follow cunningly devised myths—we were eyewitnesses—no prophecy is a matter of one's own interpretation—no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." There is confidence reflected in those words. It is the reassurance that the things of this holy season have true and lasting values. They are of God, and not of the impulses of men. The Holy Spirit is working in our midst. Amidst all of the changes from year to year in this world of ours, one thing is sure, Christmas will always be. For it is of God by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of the Lord revealed
  His will to saints of old,
Their heart and mind and lips unsealed
  His glory to unfold:
In gloom of ancient night
  They witnessed to the dawning word,
And in the coming of the light
  Proclaimed the coming Lord.

GEORGE WALLACE BRIGGS

THE PRAYER

Make Thy Word sure in our hearts, O Lord, that we may see it as the lamp burning in the dark place of our human existence; let the day dawn and the morning star arise in our heart that we may face life in the brightness of the morning light; this, we shall come to know, is not of our own making; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

AN OUTPOURING OF CERTAINTY

THE SCRIPTURE

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 27:1

In the chapter, "Something About Christmas," it was noted that for some northern countries the season of Christmas continues for twenty days from the actual date observed as the day of our Saviour's birth. There is much celebrating during these days, and significantly so, for the deep content and the varied forms that Christmas brings are much too tremendous to be exhausted in just one day of celebration. One gets the impression that the celebrators are trying joyfully to pack these days full; and on this last day of the season that "drives out" the Yuletide celebration they have concentrated all of the emotions, all of the gaiety, all of the joy, and several of the different forms of celebration, as though it had to be enough now to last through the rest of the year, until the next Yuletide should appear.

One gets something of the same feeling from the great psalms of David. Reading just the first verse of our psalm today gives the impression that he was attempting to pack into just a few, almost explosive words, the whole content of his faith in God. If ever the deeper emotions of faith could have been put into one short verse as though into a small capsule, it surely has been accomplished here. It is enough for a lifetime of Christian living.

Three words loom large in the outpouring of the psalmist's feelings, "light," "salvation," and "stronghold." We do well to search the meaning they carry as now we are looking forward to living with the Christmas message during the coming year.

"The Lord is my light!" This was an utterance of a rich inward experience of David. He had known darkness, for he had been in the valleys of gloom and despair. It was only out of such a valley that he could appreciate the new light that came from on high to dispel the gloom.

"The Lord is my salvation!" Salvation to David was, as it is to all who know it in a personal way, a restoration

from being lost to being found, from being apart from God to being restored into His grace and relationship. No wonder he spoke with such feeling. Only he who has known lostness will have any appreciation of restoration to God. And when salvation is realized, its song becomes as rapturous as the song of David.

"The Lord is my stronghold!" David's knowledge of a soldier's life brought him to an appreciation of having this stronghold. His knowledge of the dangers and insecurities of all life brought him to see the real meaning of God in his life. For to him, as to us moderns, it became plain that the only sound basis for life is within the protection of the Ultimate One.

So with David and his three-fold confession we move ahead in the Christmas certainties for life.

Clearer still and clearer
  Dawns the light from heaven,
In our sadness bringing
  News of sins forgiven;
Life has lost its shadows,
  Pure the light within;
Thou hast shed Thy radiance
  On a world of sin.

GODFREY THRING

THE PRAYER

Thou mighty God, who hast come with light and strength, bringing salvation to a sinful and uncertain world, grant Thy children who have been celebrating the holy season of the coming of Thy light a full measure of unrestrained confidence in the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Holy Jesus, every day
Keep us in the narrow way;
And, when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds thy glory hide.

WILLIAM CHATTERTON DIX

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

THE SCRIPTURE

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke 2:46-52

Today we read about Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve. His parents *brought* Him to the Temple. It is a beautiful sight when parents bring their children with them to church. It means much, too, for John and Mary and Susan to be at church—much more than we are apt to think. Many of us look back with gratitude to the fact that we were brought to church in early life, and that now in turn we can bring our own children to church.

To be with Mother and Dad in the church on Sunday means that we are with them in the house of God, that we may learn to take part in the service: singing, listening to the reading of the Word of God and to the sermon as it is preached by the minister from the pulpit. Even as children we understood much more than the elders realized or gave us credit for. The impressions that we unconsciously received have remained with us through life. Happy are the parents, and happy are the children, where there is worship together in the church!

We think here especially of Jesus in the Temple. He was brought up in a religious home. He had heard the Sacred Scriptures read, and no doubt had himself already read them and pondered their meaning. But He had not yet seen the Temple in Jerusalem. At twelve He had that privilege when His parents brought Him with them. He was now a "son of the law"—something that may remotely be compared to our confirmation.

We may be sure that the Temple impressed His young mind. He had looked forward to this event, and now it had become His experience. Small wonder that He became so engrossed in the Temple and in His conversation with the teachers that He forgot everything else. And the parents, traveling in separate groups—men and women—did not miss Him until there was a chance meeting along the way. Then there was consternation and search, and at last the return to Jerusalem to seek Him.

Finally, after finding Him engaged in a spirited discussion with the teachers, when the mother administered a mild rebuke, He answered, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

His "Father's house"—that was where He belonged. His Father's work—that was what He must do. His "must" expressed here was to impel Him through His earthly ministry, as it finally brought Him again to Jerusalem, then to Gethsemane, and at last to Calvary and the Cross. Here was where He had to be, and the temple experience became prophetic of His life and ministry.

A young student staying in a home in a congregation where he was to preach on Sunday was observed by a little boy. When the boy was asked later who this man was, he answered, "I don't know, but it's the man who belongs in church."

"Who belongs in church"—if that statement can be made of us, it will mean that, though feebly and imperfectly, we shall also "increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man."

I love Thy kingdom, Lord,
  The house of Thine abode,
The Church our blest Redeemer saved
  With His own precious Blood.

TIMOTHY DWIGHT

THE PRAYER

Dear Lord of the Temple, may love of Thy house and the worship of Thee bring us the sustenance that will enable us to increase "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man," for we ask it in His name who is our perfect example. Amen.

A LIVING SACRIFICE

THE SCRIPTURE

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned to him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Romans 12:1-5

We are considering that portion of Paul's Letter to the Romans in which he gives exhortations for the Christian life. The previous portion of the letter has been doctrinal. Paul has shown that all men, including Jew and Gentile, are under sin. All have been untrue to the light possessed, and all would be condemned, if judged according to their works. Then he has revealed and developed the doctrine of justification by faith, faith in Jesus Christ and His work of redemption, entirely apart from anything that we can do.

But Paul also makes it clear that doctrine must result in life. Our faith must bear fruit. Indeed, Paul introduces us to this new section with the word "therefore." It is an important word, because it links the new section with, and is an inevitable conclusion to, what has gone before. As redeemed persons we are to do something with this new freedom. He says, "By the mercies of God." Here is the motivation. Mercy must compel us. If we have experienced the grace of God in Christ, it will be revealed in our lives.

The doctrine of grace cannot be an excuse for sin. Paul asks, "For we who died to sin, how can we any longer live therein?" To be justified is the beginning of growth in Christlikeness. We become "living sacrifices."

A living sacrifice means that the body is presented to God. By body is meant the *entire being.* We are to be a temple of the spirit of God. In contrast to the ancient sacrices, we are now concerned with *living sacrifices.* The old sacrifices were dead. We are asked to be vital, to present our entire person to God.

Those who in ancient times presented a sacrifice gave it in its entirety. They released all claim or right to it. They left it to be used to the honor and glory of God. Thus Paul felt it in his day when speaking of "living sacrifice." Christ was all, and all was for Christ. Thus Kagawa felt it when he said that he was a gambler for God. Often in our churches gifts are brought and placed on the altar. Here

we are asked in spirit to place *ourselves* on the altar. If we have not given ourselves to God, then whose are we?

A living sacrifice means a *renewal of mind,* says Paul. Our minds have been turned from the world to God. The one who is a living sacrifice is also *humble.* The Romans judged according to rank, wealth, eloquence, office. So it is always in the world. The Christians judge according to character, and character is to be judged according to Christian standards.

As living sacrifies we remember that we are members of the body of Christ. This is true in our responsibility to ourselves and to others. Every individual is of value. Not all are alike, and not all have the same functions, but we esteem one another in love. As living sacrifices, our lives become a continual offering to God.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL

THE PRAYER

Dear God, in the spirit of men like Paul and Kagawa, help us to cast our lot with Thee in glad surrender and in obedience to Thy holy will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS IS FROM GOD

THE SCRIPTURE

About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews marveled at it, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood."

John 7:14-18

The search for knowledge can be applied to many realms—history, science, the arts. This search is also directed to the area of religion, to the doctrine of God. Sometimes people speak of the doctrine of God as if there could not be any knowledge of God, or any teaching about Him. It is pathetic to see persons who permit their soul life to starve while they waver in their decision to go to the Fountain of life.

To know is just what Jesus desires for us. We do not have a religion of ignorance and superstition, but one that deals with the knowledge of the true God. We have a church that emphasizes instruction and knowledge, an emphasis which we find in the Bible from beginning to end.

Paul declares: "I know whom I have believed." Peter says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." In our Scripture lesson Jesus speaks about the knowledge of His teachings. He invites us to put them to the test. It is fair to say that we do not really know anything until we have experienced it, or have learned it from someone who has. To know the sweetness of honey, we must taste it; to appreciate the beauty of a symphony, we must hear it; to understand the bitterness of sorrow, we must go through it.

Jesus proposes this test for His teachings. First He says that it is a matter of the will. Do we want to know? If we have doubts, are they honest doubts? The real difficulty with many vaunted doubters is that their doubts tend to be a covering up of their own wishes: their sin and their continuing in their present way of life.

Here Jesus tells us that we may learn to know His teachings by trying them out in life. "If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God." This is the way we act in life. If we are sick, we go to the doctor, and accept his prescriptions and directives.

In the same manner, we can go to the Great Physician and find healing and life and wholeness. We can go to Him and

take Him at His word. He can give us sight as He gave it to Paul. He can heal us as He healed Augustine of old. When He says, "Love your enemy," we can seek to do it with all the grace He affords. When He says, "Bless those who persecute you," we can try it, to see if it will work.

Have we ever heard anyone who has really tried the teachings of Jesus in practice say that they will not work? Is not the real problem the perversity of our will? We simply do not want to, because we are afraid of what it may do to our way of living.

But we need to remember that there is another will with which we shall have to deal: the will of God. The only wise thing for us to do is to seek to conform our will to His. When our will is caught up in His will, then doubts will flee, and the teachings of our Lord will reveal their inherent validity not only *for* us, but also *through* us.

Take my will and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL

THE PRAYER

Help us, our God, to will to do Thy will, no matter how devastating it may prove to our present way of life. If necessary, wreck it, and then rebuild it according to Thy will and purpose. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

FAITH LONGS FOR WORSHIP

THE SCRIPTURE

How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young, at thy altars, O Lord of hosts,
my king and my God. . . .
For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. . . .
O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in thee!

Psalm 84:1-3, 10, 12

From time immemorial man has been building altars and worshiping at them. Whether it was to "gods many," or to "an unknown god," or to Jehovah, the God of heaven, in various ways and with various concepts man has been busy with his sacred places.

The supreme thought of the psalm before us is of Jehovah God. Another psalmist declares, "Oh send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me to thy holy hill and to thy dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy!"

Even though Jesus did emphasize worshiping God in spirit and truth, He himself, nevertheless, went regularly to the synagogue and the Temple. Though we are released from the thought that God is to be found only in certain places, we still need a place that is sacred and holy, where we may meet God. The altars of God have their places in our lives.

There is in the human soul an urge toward God which transcends all else. For the human being is something like the eagle sitting at the highest point in the cage looking at the sky. Thus the longing heart reaches out and up to God. As we do, we find our strength in the Lord. We find refreshment even in thirsty ground. The valley of weeping is changed into a place of springs, for we have something that comes from the Lord. We may appear before God in Zion. We may reach our destination, because we trust in the Lord.

It is in this spirit that we know that a day spent in the house of God is worth more than all the days spent in the tents of wickedness. We are sure that the most menial task in the church is better than to be, even in comfort and riches, where God cannot be found.

The church blesses the infant in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism; it instructs and guides childhood; it inspires and directs the steps of youth; it has a word of comfort and

strength for old age; it points to heaven and the Paradise of God.

If we are thrilled at the thought of worship, then our life is enriched each time we go to church. Then we shall share the feelings of those who testify, "If I am not in church on Sunday, then my whole week seems to be ruined. Something seems to be lacking in my life."

For the house of God is a refuge and a strength. It is the station at which our souls receive refreshment and energy. It is our greatest bulwark against temptation and sin. It is our weekly inspiration point. Thus we long for the church as blind men long for light, as the deaf man prays for hearing, and as the sick desire healing.

The words of the psalmist become ours: "How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; . . . O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in thee!"

Sure as Thy truth shall last,
  To Sion shall be given
The brightest glories earth can yield,
  And brighter bliss of heaven.

TIMOTHY DWIGHT

THE PRAYER

We thank Thee for Thy church among us, O God! Keep us faithful in attendance, reverent in worship, and receptive to the comfort and guidance of Thy holy Word. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HOW ARE WE RELATED TO JESUS?

THE SCRIPTURE

While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." Matthew 12:46-50

The answer to the question, "How are we related to Jesus?" takes a relationship for granted; and that is correct. For when we have met Jesus, it means that a decision has been made. We cannot be indifferent to Him, for what we may think is indifference becomes a passive form of hostility. We are really for or against Jesus.

This, therefore, becomes an occasion to examine ourselves. What is our real attitude to Jesus? What do we think about Him? What is the testimony of our lives? We can know what the answer must be, for there are tests that we can apply. Jesus says that he who is not for Him is against Him.

Let us look at some relationships. There was His mother. She pondered the things that were said about Him in her heart. She believed in Him, trusted Him, and was devoted to Him to the end. The last picture we have of her is on her knees in prayer together with the believers. There were His brothers. They did not believe in Him at the beginning. They chided Him because of His deeds and His claims. They said, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. . . . If you do these things, show yourself to the world." But later they were led to faith, and James became a pillar in that early church.

There was Judas Iscariot, the treasurer among the disciples, and trusted by them, who in spite of his nearness to Jesus became unfaithful, turned traitor, and delivered his Master into the hands of the enemies. There was Paul, Pharisee of Pharisees, opposing the name of Jesus, and bent on killing those who followed Him, who was converted, and became the greatest of the Apostles.

What, now, is *our* true relationship to Jesus? Do we know Him as our Savior, trust in Him, love Him, and obey Him? Is our life truly devoted to Him? Are we really His brothers? Jesus speaks of such a relationship. "Whoever

does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." We are His brothers not because we are sons of this or that one, but because we do His will. Here is the test. Are we so devoted to Him that we are eager to do what He asks?

If we have such a relationship to Jesus, it will affect our human relationships. We shall, with Him, see in every person one for whom Christ died. As He talked to the sinner at the well, called the tax collector to follow Him, so shall we have compassion on every human being. We shall be brothers and sisters to the Chinaman or the Negro next door, as well as to those in China or Africa.

"In Christ there is no East or West." In Him there is neither Jew nor Gentile. We are brothers and sisters for whom He died. "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? . . . For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." Following Jesus, we shall have one Father, and be a saved and happy brotherhood.

He is my Lord, my Friend, my loving Brother,
And Jesus Christ is His most blessed Name.
He loves more tenderly than any mother:
To rest in Him is more than wealth and fame.

CARL OLOF ROSENIUS

THE PRAYER

Dear Christ, our Savior and Brother, as we kneel before Thy throne, help us to be mindful of the truth that there is room at that throne for people of every race and color who earnestly seek Thee and Thy will. We ask it in Thy name. Amen.

JESUS CALLS HIS FOLLOWERS BRETHREN

THE SCRIPTURE

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying,

"I will proclaim thy name to my brethren,
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."

And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me."

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Hebrews 2:11-16

Yesterday we were told that they who do the will of the heavenly Father have a relationship to Jesus which is stronger than that of flesh and blood. Today we are given the further assurance that Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brethren.

How wonderful it is that God wants us as His children! Many of us have learned the words of explanation for the introduction of the Lord's Prayer: "God would thereby affectionately encourage us to believe that He is truly our Father and that we are His children indeed, so that we may call upon Him with all cheerfulness and confidence, even as beloved children entreat their affectionate parents."

God wants us to be His children in Jesus Christ, and Jesus wants to be our elder brother. This was the purpose of the promises given to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and repeated through the centuries. It was His purpose in the selection of the Covenant People, in the giving of the Law, the tabernacle, and the Temple. They were to be His people. This was also the purpose in the sending of Jesus. All Bible history has this theme: that we might become the children of God.

Let us consider what Jesus has done for us. He left the glory which He had with the Father before the world began in order to become man. He became flesh in order that He should be able to suffer and die, and that we should become partakers with Him of the heavenly glory. He dwelt among us in a ministry of love and mercy. He triumphed in His death and glorious resurrection. Thereby He overcame, made naught, the power of the devil, saved us, and removed the fear of death.

He became our Brother, so that we might become God's children. He who sanctifies and we who are sanctified have the same Father in heaven. Thus we become brothers and friends.

But for us there still remain the questions: Are we truly

His brothers? Are we His friends? We say: "To have a friend, one must be a friend." This must not be mere words. Words are necessary. By words we are instructed at home, in Sunday school, in confirmation class, in worship, and by the sermon. With our lips we make confession of our faith.

But there must be more. There must be the dedication of our lives. Let us remind ourselves of yesterday's words: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." If we meet this test and condition, then the words are true for us that "he is not ashamed to call [us] brethren." It means the yielding of our heart and life to our Savior, not ashamed at any time and in any place in word and deed to confess His name before men.

Soon shall He come with power to bless
All who do here His name confess;
And then may this my glory be,
That He is not ashamed of me!

JOSEPH GRIGG

THE PRAYER

O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also that they may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for The First Sunday after the Epiphany

IN THE DAYS OF OUR YOUTH

THE SCRIPTURE

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; . . . before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6-7

The Book of Ecclesiastes contains much that is gloomy and pessimistic. It begins with the words, "Vanity of vanities, . . . All is vanity." Very near the end of the final chapter we hear the same refrain. Between these chapters we find words such as these: "All things are full of weariness." "There is nothing new under the sun." "He who increases knowledge increases sorrow." Such is indeed the lot of the man who seeks his highest good in wisdom, in pleasure, in the affairs of business, and in wealth.

But a change appears toward the close of the book, as the Preacher concludes: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." In our selected Scripture we read: "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth."

It is in order here to remind ourselves of the truth that God has remembered us. For those of us who were brought up in the Christian faith it would seem that He remembered us *especially* in our youth. In the prayers at home, through our Christian training, and through the fellowship that we had in the church, God wonderfully remembered us as young people.

But here *we* are asked to remember *God,* remember Him in such a way that our lives are genuinely affected by it, a remembrance that results in obedience to His holy will. While we are still young, while yet there is strength and enthusiasm in body and mind, we are to remember God.

The temptation comes to us all to think that it is enough to remember God when we have become old and worn out—after the "fling" has been taken. But we are to give God the vigor of youth, the best that is in us. We may think that it was wonderful that the repentant thief on the cross only a few hours from the portals of death could hear the words, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." And it was! But how much more wonderful to have served God

all through life! To have presented our bodies as a living sacrifice! There we have it: not the dying embers of a wasted life, but the radiant glow and sparkle of full vigor. And then all through life to the end of the pilgrimage.

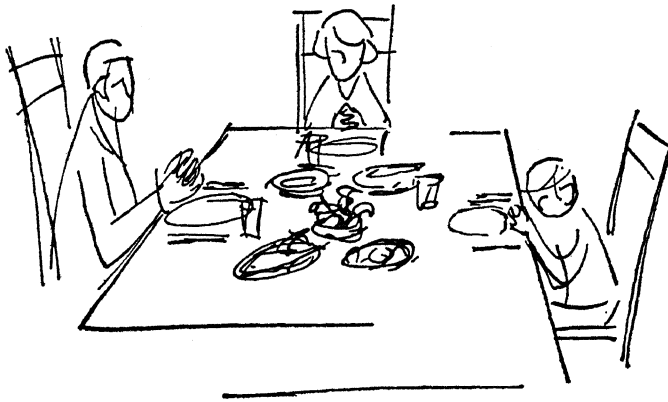
The Preacher's warning that we do it "before the evil days come" is valid. His description of the evil days with their desolation should be reason enough to make us want to seize the now, and use it for Him. A life well spent is all that we have to leave behind us when its tale is told. It is a heritage that we bequeath to posterity. When the end of our days comes, there will be enduring satisfaction in having passed them well; and they are passed well when we remember and serve Jesus. Back of a life well lived stands the rewarding God, and through His grace in Christ Jesus He will remember those who have remembered Him. Jesus will remember us and confess us before the Father in heaven.

And when these failing lips grow dumb,
  And mind and memory flee,
When Thou shalt in Thy kingdom come,
  Jesus, remember me.

JAMES MONTGOMERY

THE PRAYER

Dear Lord of all life, help us to remember and serve Thee from the early morning hours and through life's day, until it fades into a sunset made radiant by Thy glorious promises. Receive us then to Thy eternal home. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



TO THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

THE SCRIPTURE

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. . . . This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

John 2:1, 11

In the tradition of the Church Year, this week might well be called "Christian Home Week." It represents a long tradition, much longer than some of the parallel national celebrations like Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Christian Family Week. Each one of these represents a lovely thought and encourages the very sound custom of taking time to remember the importance of every family relationship. It adds to the observance of each one of these when we are reminded that the church through the centuries has carefully provided for a day that might be called "The Festival of the Christian Home." On this Sunday the worshiping congregation dwells on the thought of Jesus and His presence in the family circle; it is an action that thrusts itself into the whole week that follows.

It is a discerning people that realizes that as the home goes, so goes the community, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world. Where family life is filled with love and trust and security, where parents love the children and are loved in return, where purity and ideals and proper conduct are nurtured by actual living example in addition to words, there is the guarantee for a high standard of community life. Certain nationalistic groups that emphasize the oneness and cohesiveness of the family unit have developed in exemplary fashion a fiber of moral quality and strength that has become the envy of others. Among such people juvenile delinquency is at its lowest, the marriage bond is held in highest respect, and the moral tone is outstandingly high. Among people of this kind we find the most respect for law and order and the rights of people.

The observations just made are true of nations even outside of the Christian influence. But the qualities thus observed are even more true where the light of the Christian faith has broken through. Where Jesus Christ has come into the family circle, the light of heaven has entered, and a new power has worked its influence. It is the presence

of Christ that makes the difference. Where once He has entered the human sphere, life must be different from what it was before. Without Him, man's efforts are merely human; with Him, the power of a new life has come into existence.

It is significant that Jesus' first public appearance was in a family setting, and at the time of a wedding. The Christian church has taken this as a divine seal upon the marriage ceremony, and it constantly recognizes that a wedding without Christ's presence is devoid of life's most important relationships. No wonder then that a Christian community is concerned that marriage remain under the sanction of the church of Christ, and that the Christian home remain strong in the Lord.

Lord, who at Cana's wedding feast
  Didst as a guest appear,
Thou dearer far than earthly guest,
  Vouchsafe Thy presence here;
For holy Thou indeed dost prove
  The marriage vow to be,
Proclaiming it a type of love
  Between the Church and Thee.

ADELAIDE THRUPP

THE PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people, and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany

LOVE THAT IS REAL

THE SCRIPTURE

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. Romans 12:9-13

The family circle is the concrete setting for some of life's deepest and most important lessons. Two of these lessons deserve our special consideration today. The one is that all good things in our possession have been given to us; they are not of our own making. The second is that good gifts have been given for the purpose of being used. It is in the Christian home that we learn these lessons most effectively.

The best qualities of life are learned in the setting of family relationships long before they are taught in formal schooling; and they are impressed through the experience of relationships within the group far more effectively than they are learned through the word of verbalized teaching. The Apostle lists some of these virtues of the Christian life: love that is without hypocrisy, a tender affection toward the brethren, diligence, the shunning of evil, a fervent spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patience, concern for others, and hospitality. These can be the knowledge of the heart long before they become knowledge of the mind.

Human experience teaches that virtues like these come out of real day-to-day encounter with life. God's working with man is always in the concrete situation. He comes in the simple daily experience of human events, in the small meetings of life, in what we often well call the trivial and the insignificant. A mother tucking the small child in for the night, a father speaking a soft word and planting a goodnight kiss, a gesture of sacrifice and self-giving on the part of a parent, a word of reprimand given in love—these are the ways by which children learn the lessons of life, far beyond what is conveyed in carefully constructed lectures and explanations.

The home constitutes the situation where these lessons are best taught, more than in the school, more than in the church. It is folly to think that the school and the church can make up for the failure of the home.

If Christian love is to pervade the world, it must first

be displayed in the homes of those who confess Christ. If youth are to be expected to shun evil, they must learn the lesson by example in the home. Where honor is to prevail, the home is first responsible to demonstrate it. Where diligence is expected, it must first show itself in the home. In everything that makes for a good world it can be said, "As the home goes, so goes the world." The only way to a Christian community is through the Christian home.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
  Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
  And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
  Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
  To do and to endure.

EDWIN HATCH

THE PRAYER

Thou God, who hast loved us with a love beyond compare, make Thy love real to our family circle and to all Christian families, that through it we may learn the lesson of loving and being loved, so that from our homes may come the power that will transform the human community into the perfect image of Thy Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

A PERSONAL MEETING

THE SCRIPTURE

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:16-24

When Jesus confronts the sinner, He becomes very personal! This may be the reason why many persons do not want to confront Him, or perhaps why they want to depersonalize the whole meaning of the Christian faith. They say that their religion is such an intimate thing, such a personal thing, that it should not be spread out before the prying eyes of men. What they really mean is that they don't have the courage or the honesty to face the real personal meaning of life. Or if they do break down and allow a discussion of religion, they insist on keeping it on the plane of ideas and concepts that can be bounced around adroitly without any particular harm or self-disclosure; their discussion serves only as a camouflage to keep others from penetrating into their personal selves.

Men have often tried that sort of thing with the church, and sadly have too often succeeded in making the church into a vast, depersonalized hiding place for their real selves. They talk about the church as a system and as an organization; they spar with ideas and doctrine, with sacred history and Biblical concepts, and successfully conceal themselves. Tragically, in doing this they close themselves against a face-to-face meeting with the Lord who has His own way of piercing into the hearts of those who will respond to His confrontation.

The woman at Sychar's well has become history's illustrious example of Jesus in meeting with a human soul. Jesus saw her at her deepest levels; and she felt the gradual laying bare of her innermost secrets. Not a word came from her lips but that the Lord discerned the underlying feelings and motivations of her life. What a field day this interview would have provided for a convention of psychiatrists! And to think that Jesus began to explore the depths of human personality long before that profession had ever been dreamed of.

The real meaning of religion and the inner man merges in

clear lines from that conversation at Sychar. It was not basically a discussion about wells and drinking cups, or of traditions and holy places, or of ideas and schedules of worship. It was an affirmative response to the cutting edge of the Master's insight into the levels of secret sins and past conduct when He cleared away the debris of arguments and reasoning. It was a sinner's responsive prayer to Jesus, "Give me this water which no one else can give." This is the meaning of the Christian faith: a personal response in meeting with Jesus. He alone has the water of eternal life; it is available only to him who responds to the Giver.

Search me, God, and know my heart,
Lord of truth and mercy;
Try me, Thou who from afar
Knowest all my secrets;
And if any wicked way
Should be found within me,
Blessed Saviour, lead Thou me
In the way eternal.

CLAUS AUGUST WENDELL

THE PRAYER

Father in heaven, who through Jesus Christ dost face each man in searching penetration, lead each one of us into personal meeting with our Savior, that all might be laid bare in Thy holy presence for the cleansing of our hearts and the renewal of our minds. Amen.

ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER

THE SCRIPTURE

I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience, as did my fathers, when I remember you constantly in my prayers. As I remember your tears, I long night and day to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you. 2 Timothy 1:3-5

Young Timothy must have been one of the first among the third-generation Christians. In his day there were few who could have known both a mother and a grandmother of such steadfast faith as were Eunice and Lois. What a happy contrast this is to the Old Testament reference, "even unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Man's sinful nature is a part of his human heritage. From the time of the Fall each new human birth has passed on the natural tendency to do that which is evil. Despite man's attempts to argue against this Biblical truth, the evidence is overwhelming that man is born not with an inclination to do good, not even as a blank piece of paper, but as separated from good and disinclined to do good. The refreshing news of God's breaking through into human life in the gospel message, is that it is not necessary for man to remain in this sinful condition. Now instead of thinking of the evil that goes from one generation to another, we can and should think about the Christian faith that is transmitted from one generation to another.

God has set the family and the church as the two basic meeting places where man's sinful nature can be faced and overcome. The family is the first experience of what it means to be a person. For there is the mutual communication that makes for personhood. In the life lived between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, the child learns how to become himself. He comes into the meaning of his own self. The values of life for himself are those he captures in the circle of family love. Love itself as a thing given and received, kindness, thoughtfulness, work, play, and co-operation—these are first and best learned in the home. The higher lessons, too, those out of which all lesser virtues spring—the reality of God, the meaning of prayer, the nature of the inner life—these are also most naturally appropriated in the home setting. When the home fails in this communication, the odds are overwhelming that

they will not be learned elsewhere, whether in church or school or community.

The Apostle Paul recognized the influence of a mother on her son. This mother, Eunice, in turn had received her faith from her own mother, Lois. This is the process by which each succeeding generation is to become Christian. The parents communicate to their children, and then the children in turn to their children. It is false to think that the church or the school can give to the child what the home has failed to give; the children are more apt to become what the homes are. A moral breakdown in the community reflects a moral breakdown in the home. A weak church reflects a community of homes that have neglected their Christian privileges. The Epiphany "breakthrough" into the lives of the younger generation will occur in the homes of the church, or it will not come at all.

Thy hand, O God, has guided
  Thy flock from age to age;
The wondrous tale is written,
  Full clear, on every page;
Our fathers owned Thy goodness,
  And we their deeds record;
And both of these bear witness,
  One Church, one Faith, one Lord.

EDWARD HAYES PLUMPTRE

THE PRAYER

Thy witness O God, preserved in the world from one generation to another, is steadfast and sure; as we have received it from our fathers in the faith, so enable us to be faithful and true, that generations to come may through us receive this Word of Life. Amen.

OUR MOST HONORED GUEST

THE SCRIPTURE

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Luke 19: 5-7

Few families are ready to invite just anyone into their homes to share bed and board. Usually there is some special and personal reason back of every invitation, indicating why we invite certain people and seldom invite others. The invited guest has a special meaning for the family. At the Sunday dinner table he is welcomed into the midst of the family's social life. The overnight guest shares deeply a central place in the family's heart. For traditionally the home has become the place and the symbol of life's deepest and most intimate meanings. There we have our privacy; there we have interactions between person and person; there we have fellowship at its best. These are not things to share promiscuously and superficially.

With the nature of the home then as it is, it was a great and joyful event in the life of Zacchaeus when he heard Jesus say one day, "For I must stay at your house today." This was Jesus' indication of willingness and desire to be a guest in his home. But it was a greater moment when in a burst of joy Zacchaeus hurried down from the sycamore tree and received Jesus. The two-way meeting at the level of intimate friendship had been completed. An open door had been entered by One who would share the hallowed ground of a family circle.

We may never know the conversation that went on during that visit. Scripture gives only a clue. Surely it was a happy visit; and Zacchaeus was not influenced by the comments of the self-appointed neighborhood critics. Surely it was a time of new commitment and resolve, for Zacchaeus had formulated a totally new philosophy in the handling of earthly goods and in dealing with his fellow men. There is every reason to believe that his family followed him in these new resolves. Whatever else may have been said or done, the sociability of this visit must have been only the kind that was proper in the presence of Jesus, and the kind that revealed the new life adopted because Jesus had been ac-

cepted as a house guest. Jesus summarized the event himself, "Today salvation has come to this house."

The people we invite to share our family hospitality witness to the whole neighborhood what kind of family we are. Those we invite also have a great deal of influence as to the kind of family we become. The lesson is such an obvious one. It is unbelievable that anyone can be satisfied with less than the greatest of all house guests.

O happy home, where Thou art loved the dearest,
Thou loving Friend, and Saviour of our race,
And where among the guests there never cometh
One who can hold such high and honored place.

KARL JOHANN PHILIPP SPITTA
Tr. *Sarah Borthwick Findlater*

THE PRAYER

O God, our heavenly Father, look in favor upon all Christian homes, defending them against every evil, and making them sanctuaries for peace, love, and joy. Enable them to receive Christ as the daily Guest who gives family life its deepest meaning. Amen.

THE HEALTHY HOME

THE SCRIPTURE

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Good health begins at home! Of course, this refers most obviously to physical health! The best place to lay the foundations for a healthy life is the family setting. Here life begins and takes its direction. Good habits of eating, working, playing, exercising, and resting are shaped in the home. A healthy race lays its best foundations for a healthy future in the life of the family.

Good mental health also begins in the home! Here the attitudes of love and trust are engendered. Members of the family help each other to experience the rudiments of thoughtfulness. Together they learn to give love and to receive love, lessons that are inseparable. Neither receiving nor giving love can exist without each other. In the family atmosphere the child learns that he is accepted, and he learns how to accept others. No single place of human relationship surpasses the family circle as the strategic place for these qualities of life. They are the stuff out of which good mental health is made.

Good social health begins in the home! What man is at home is the more accurate indicator of what he really is than what in public he tries to show himself to be. Human relationships that make for happiness and helpfulness begin at home, or they do not begin at all. The healing of the social ills of mankind depends first of all on a healthy social relationship in the intimacy of the family life.

Good spiritual life begins in the home! In this the home is the basic unit of the religious community. How the home succeeds in reaching the inner being of its members has much to do with the building of the church. The Apostle Paul had deep insights into this principle. To the children of the Ephesian church he wrote, "Obey your parents in the Lord," and to the parents, "Nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord." There was to be no separation between "being in the Lord" and the normal parent-child relationships in the home. To be "in the Lord" and to have

all one's actions and attitudes in Him, is to be of sound spiritual life.

These four are not to be separated in counting the healthy person. The body is the temple for the indwelling spirit of man. The mind is the faculty by which he knows and learns and thinks. Relationships with others is the outgo of feeling in the environment of a human society. The spirit is of the deep reaches where only the Spirit of God can penetrate. Working together in close-knit harmony, they make for the healthy person.

O happy home, where each one serves Thee, lowly,
  Whatever his appointed work may be,
Till every common task seems great and holy,
  When it is done, O Lord, as unto Thee.

KARL JOHANN PHILIPP SPITTA
Tr. *Sarah Borthwick Findlater*

THE PRAYER

Lord Jesus, come into the daily life of our home and the homes of our church and our nation, so that in the atmosphere of faith and love the spirit of obedience to Thy will might prevail, and that every thought, word, and deed might truly be in the Lord. Amen.

A WISE SON

THE SCRIPTURE

A wise son hears his father's instruction,
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
From the fruit of his mouth a good man eats good,
but the desire of the treacherous is for violence.
He who guards his mouth preserves his life;
he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
The soul of the sluggard craves, and gets nothing,
while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

Proverbs 13:1-4

The art of listening is a difficult one. But it is so important! The well-developed person is the one who knows how to listen when others are speaking. How one listens to others is indicative of what one is. Some people listen well; others are poor listeners. To listen well is one of life's most difficult lessons to learn, for by nature we would rather do the talking than the listening.

The wisdom writer had insights into this important attribute. He understood what made for a good son. "A wise son," he wrote, "hears his father's instruction." He spoke as though he had been well schooled in the twentieth-century findings of sociologists and psychiatrists. They tell us that the foundation for happiness in each generation is dependent directly upon the child's relationship with its parent, and that this relationship is bound up in the content and manner of the parent's instruction and example to the child.

Surely, the wise man did not mean that there was to be no mutual conversation between father and son. There are parents of an extreme authoritarian school who feel that "the child is to be seen, not heard," and that whatever is heard can be only the voice of parental authority. When this takes place the parent assumes the position of master, and the child assumes the position of blind follower. The expression of wisdom between parent and child is a two-way street; the parent is wise in understanding his child in loving guidance clearly expressed; and the child is drawn into this wisdom of love and understanding, so that he really hears what the parent is saying. So the son is just one side of wisdom in family communication.

The world needs a recovery of this two-way conversation in the family. Modern life is encroaching on the family. An evening spent with parents and children together is getting more and more difficult to arrange. The breakfast and the dinner table as the place for family conversation are being

pressured out of our homes. The family pew in the church and the hour spent by the family at play are becoming more and more rare. This breakdown works against the developing of both parents and children who are prepared to be wise in the basic instructions for living.

The son who is raised in the atmosphere of love and confidence has the best chance of becoming a wise son. He is the son who will listen with wisdom. He listens to his father as a father, not first for what he says, but for who he is. When the father speaks in love and wisdom, it becomes easy and natural for the son to listen to the words of fatherly instruction. When this happens, the future is secure. We need a generation of wise fathers who beget wise sons for the future.

O God of youth, whose Spirit in our hearts is stirring
Hope and desire for noble lives and true,
Keep us, we pray Thee, steadfast and unerring;
With light and love divine our souls endue.

BATES GILBERT BURT

THE PRAYER

Give us listening ears, O Lord, to distinguish between the voice of good and the voice of evil, so that we may respond to words of love and turn away from words of those who seek our hurt. May we heed the voice of loving rebuke and turn away from the voice of tempting praise. In Christ's name. Amen.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF FAITH

THE SCRIPTURE

As he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." . . . And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Matthew 8: 5-10, 13

* The reader is reminded that Jan. 25 is the day of the conversion of St. Paul. The meditation for this day will be found on pages 227-229.

The fellowship of faith is great and wonderful. It reaches from time to eternity. It is independent of what we call space. It is raceless, because in it there will be neither German, nor Englishman, nor Japanese, nor American, but all will be one in Christ. It transcends all human barriers. It makes us one with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Paul, Augustine, St. Francis, Luther, Wesley, and the men and women of God through the ages.

God is no respecter of persons. It is difficult for us to learn that truth. We prefer to imagine ourselves favored in some way. Surely, we think, the laws that do indeed apply to others do not apply to us. Surely, God is going to be especially favorable to *us*.

But what a dangerous fallacy! Clear and unmistakable is the Word of God: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham as our Father: for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." These words for our day would mean something like this: Let us not think that we belong to a "superior race." Let us not imagine that mere church membership, and participation in the work of the church, will save. These are necessary and essential, but they are not enough. For they are not all Christian who are of the church; neither because we are descendants of members of the church are we thereby necessarily the children of God.

The fellowship of faith is to be found among those who are true believers. Faith is of both a receiving and a giving nature. Faith receives the salvation which is in Christ, and faith in turn presents life and all possessions to the Lord. As our faith, so will our actions be; as we believe, so we do.

The centurion was not even a Jew. He was perhaps a convert to Judaism, and thereby enjoyed some of the privileges of the Jews. This man does not even ask help for himself. He has a servant lying sick at home. It is for this

servant that he prays. When Jesus says that He will come and heal him, he exclaims, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."

It is after this experience with the centurion that Jesus declares: "Many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown away into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." Jesus makes it so perfectly clear: salvation does not depend on race, color, nationality, or locality; it depends on belonging to the fellowship of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a time for us to think deeply into our own lives. Are we helping to make our church and our community what they ought to be? Are we cheerful and congenial? Do we extend the friendly hand? Do we talk to strangers? Are we hospitable? All these things belong to the fellowship of faith. It is what the early Christians did. It is the mark of a true believer.

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
  Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
  Which is more than liberty.

FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER

THE PRAYER

Help us, Lord, to be as color blind as Thou art in Thy love for all people, and to be as raceless as our Savior in His ministry on earth. Cause our interest and love to extend to every area of ignorance and need. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

THE SCRIPTURE

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peacably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:16-21

Sometimes we hear the question asked, "What kind of world would this be, if everyone acted as I do?" And it is a good question! Perhaps we should have to admit that it would not be a very good world! Our sinful flesh makes it easier to act in the fashion of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." We want to pay back in kind—and with a little interest. If anyone has said something nasty about us, we must find something nastier to say about him. This is true among us as individuals, and we observe it between the nations; and so the whirl of slander and ill will draws us deeper and deeper into its ugly pool.

How different it would be, if we prayed God to give us the grace to live by the pattern of the Scripture before us. "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly." How much more to our liking it is to live and do as we please, and to choose out the associates who will increase our prestige. "Never be conceited." But isn't it natural to think that we are just a bit smarter than others, and to talk about how bright our children are?

"Repay no man evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all." But meekly to take it on the chin, is not that a sign of weakness? Is it not more manly to stand up and fight back? But we are to take thought for what is noble. When we are tempted to avenge ourselves, we are to remember that vengeance belongs to God. He will handle the situation in His way and time.

Rather, we are to feed the enemy when he is hungry, thus heaping "burning coals upon his head." In one overarching sentence Paul tells us that, instead of being overcome by evil, we are to overcome evil with good. Here, after all, lies the real victory. We overcome our enemy in the true and abiding sense when by patience and kindness and love we make possible every opportunity for him to become our friend.

The psalmist once complained, "In return for my love they accuse me." That's hard to take—hard for individuals and hard for nations. But what is the psalmist's solution? He declares, "I make prayer for them." Peter says: "For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval."

This was the spirit that Booker T. Washington revealed when he said, "No man, either white or black, from North or from South, shall drag me down so low as to hate him." The greatest word of reconciling love came from the lips of our Savior when He prayed for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

This grace of overcoming evil with good can be attained as a gift from God. There can at least be a growth in that direction. It will come when we heed Paul's word "to present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, . . . [our] spiritual worship."

Give us Thy love, for there are lives to brighten;
Give us Thy patience, Lord, to trust and pray;
Give us Thy strength, for there are loads to lighten;
Give us Thy light, to show us all the way.

ERNEST EDWIN RYDEN

THE PRAYER

Help us, Lord, in every circumstance of life to act not as our human inclinations would direct us, but as Thy sovereign love impels us. In Jesus' name, who loved and who loves even His most bitter enemies. Amen.

WHEN A CITY IS WON FOR CHRIST

THE SCRIPTURE

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." John 4:39-42

A woman of Samaria had come to the well at Sychar to draw water. In the course of His conversation with her Jesus said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

A spark of faith was kindled in this woman who had nothing but a life of sin to confess. Yet, when that faith was kindled, she could not keep it to herself. She must go back to her people and tell them about this remarkable man who might be the Messiah.

In a hotel in a little city in Minnesota was a man who had made a certain invention. He was busy telling every one in the lobby who would listen to him about it. He was not afraid or ashamed to talk about it, because he was sure that he really had something to talk about. Our political candidates for office do not hesitate to tell us why they believe that *they* should be elected.

But we may well ask ourselves, How eager are we to bear witness of the Christ, so that others may come to believe in Him? We sing in a gospel hymn, "And when you have found Him, tell others the story." But are we really eager to do it, or are we among those who have been called "tongue-tied Christians"?

This woman of Samaria became an instrument in God's hand to bring others to Christ. She was weak and sinful, but God is not dependent on human strength. Even vessels of clay can hold water. When faith becomes a "spring of water welling up," then there will be witness. We find joy in doing what we really want to do.

Through the testimony of this woman many of the Samaritans believed in Jesus. It was just a simple word: "He told me all that I ever did." Do we perhaps make witnessing too difficult? All that we need to do is tell our fellow men that we believe in Jesus, and what believing in Him means to us.

Greater things happened to these Samaritans. They asked Jesus to stay with them. How wise they were! And He stayed there two days—two days in the flesh. But heaven alone will disclose with how many souls He stayed for ever. They were brought to Him by a sinful woman; they believed through personal experience.

So it will always be. Bring a sinful woman to Christ, and you may lay a city at His feet. There is so much to be done. "For I have many people in this city," was the word of the Lord to Paul. City or country, we must think of the many people the Lord has waiting to hear the Word of God. There are more people in the world today, due to the population increase, who have not heard His gracious words than there were when they were first spoken.

God is waiting for us who have the light of the gospel to let that light shine with the radiance of enthusiastic witness and dedicated lives, so that others may be brought to faith in Him through Christ.

Can we whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Can we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?

REGINALD HEBER

THE PRAYER

Dear God, grant that the clear light of a living faith may so shine in us and through us that others may thereby be drawn to Him who is the light of the world, even Jesus, our Savior. For we ask it in His name. Amen.

FAITH CREATES MEN OF POWER

THE SCRIPTURE

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Hebrews 11:13-16

Faith is a familiar word in the ministry of Jesus. "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed . . ." We hear Him upbraid the faithless: "O you of little faith." We are told that in some places He could do no mighty words because of their unbelief. To the stumbling one He said, "Do not doubt, only believe." In the very night in which He was betrayed He said to the fearful disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me."

The chapter before us begins with the words, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith deals with intangibles and invisibles. Faith is always reaching out to what has not yet been attained.

Faith is trust: we accept the promises of God. Faith is obedience: we seek to do the will of God. Trust leads to obedience, and obedience reveals that there is trust. Thus viewed, faith enters into so many things: eating, taking a healing medicine, sowing the grain of wheat. Faith enters into the larger things of life, such as, preparation for our life's work and the adventures and achievements of the future.

In all of this we may draw on experiences and observations. There is help for *our* faith as we read about the lives of men and women of faith. What happened to them? We read that "by [faith] men of old received divine approval." Abel's sacrifice was made more acceptable through faith. Faith made possible the life of Enoch who "walked with God" and who "was not, because God took him." Faith gave Noah his patience in the building of the ark. Abraham, the pioneer and trail-blazer, the father of the chosen people, wrought his work through faith. So with Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and the list of faith's heroes which grows too long to itemize.

They all died in faith. They did not in their lifetime see the fulfillment of the promises. They merely saw and greeted them from afar. They confessed that they were

merely strangers and pilgrims on earth—as indeed we all are! But they pressed on, with no desire to turn back, because they were seeking a true homeland, a "better country," a "heavenly one."

So they labored and achieved. There were hardships, difficulties, persecutions, and martyrdoms. Faith always has obstacles to overcome. But they triumphed, even as men of faith triumph today—Kagawa, Bonhoeffer, Lilje, Berggrav, and countless others. For faith is not only "believing in spite of the evidence." It is also "obeying in spite of the consequences."

Forever it is true for us—each one of us: "This is the victory . . . even our faith." We achieve the victory when in trust and obedience we accept the words of Jesus: "Have faith in God." Then our eyes, too, will be fixed on the heavenly country and the city prepared, and we shall be among those who in faith "march on to glory."

My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
  Savior divine! . . .
O let me from this day
  Be wholly Thine.

RAY PALMER

THE PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, grant us a faith that sees beyond the present, a faith that empowers us to go all the way in obedience and service, assured that it is the fulfillment of Thy holy will. Amen.

THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER

THE SCRIPTURE

And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick of a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and served him. That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." Matthew 8: 14-17

Human life is always responsive to the touch of a master. But the touch can be for ill or for good. There are masters of deceit and evil, whose influence is like poison and whose words and actions are corrupt and corrupting. The world has suffered much from bad masters, and in our very day we are paying the price in blood and anguish.

On the other hand, there are individuals whose touch is a benediction; who make us better physically, mentally, and spiritually; who make us happier, more hopeful, and more zestful by their presence; whose life is a gracious blessing to us.

This is supremely the case with the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet's word, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd," was fulfilled in Him. He spoke the eternally meaningful words, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

Once a woman, sick and in need of healing, drew near to Him. She reasoned, "If I only touch his garment, I shall be made well." She touched the hem of His garment, and she was healed. The touch of Jesus revealed its power in a special way in His dealings with the lepers. He reached out His hand and touched them, even as He spoke the healing word.

In our Scripture lesson we read that when Peter's mother-in-law was lying sick of a fever He "touched her hand, and the fever left her." Then in the evening they brought the sick to Him. Anyone who has been sick to the point of sleeplessness remembers how he dreaded the evening and the long hours of the night. But Jesus has compassion on us. He can take away also the dread of the night.

"The healing of His seamless dress
  Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
  And we are whole again."

The story of the compassionate Jesus is more than a lovely picture of nineteen hundred years ago. It speaks to us of what He can do for us now. And we need Him now! If ever there was a period in our lifetime when the people of the world carried griefs and burdens, it is now. And it is to us, to us who live on earth just now, that He desires to come. He wishes to place His loving and gentle hand on our fevered brow, and heal us. Peter's home was not spared from illness; nor will ours be. But at the touch of the Master, the fever of life will be "hushed."

If we know what it means that the blessed hand of Jesus has been placed on us, then we shall remember the sick and suffering in the world who also need it. And, under Him, our hands will reach out in benediction to them. Our life will then never be dull, hopeless, or despairing; it will be filled with zeal and purpose because it has been touched by Jesus.

Ah, Lord! Thou knowest us altogether,
  Each heart's sore sickness, whatever it be.
Touch Thou our hands! Let the fever leave us—
  And so shall we minister unto Thee.

Author Unknown

THE PRAYER

Dear Lord, we thank Thee that Thou art our dwelling place, and that underneath are Thy everlasting arms. May Christ, whose loving hand reached down to touch life's ugliest sores, be laid on us in blessing. Make us a blessing to others. We ask it in His name. Amen.

GOD GIVES COMFORT AND HOPE

THE SCRIPTURE

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

Paul begins this section of his Second Letter to the Thessalonians with words of thanksgiving. "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord." There is gratitude in the heart of the great apostle and missionary, as he thinks of the Christians in the church at Thessalonica. How wonderful when pastors can truly speak in this way about the members of their congregations!

Today we stand wondering before the events that are taking place. Is a special judgment of God sweeping over the earth? Of this fact we may rest assured: when the cup of sin is full, then the wrath of God is imminent. And enough has indeed been happening in these latter years to make one feel that such a judgment is due, in fact, has already come!

As we look at our Scripture lesson, we find that there were definite reasons why Paul was thankful. The Christians of Thessalonica had been chosen by God from the beginning. We should be truly grateful to know that God's will for all of us from the foundation of the world is our salvation! It is only willful unbelief and disobedience that will keep us away from the love of God.

But amid his appreciation of the Christians in Thessalonica Paul also pleads with them that they stand fast in the faith, and hold to the traditions. Traditions are the things that have been handed down or over to us. They are what we have received from those who have gone before, distilled in the crucible of their experiences and thinking. By the Christian tradition we understand that body of truth in which we have the message of salvation in Christ.

The pleading voice comes to us through the centuries that we also, who are living in this year of grace, hold to the traditions that have come. Is not our great need to have something to which we can hold fast when everything around us

crumbles? We have it in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"He who endures to the end will be saved," is the promise of Jesus. We are to be good soldiers of the Master, and remember that after the battle there will be victory. In the economy of God there must be a cross, if there is to be a crown.

By the promise of Scripture we may rest assured that, if we stand fast, we shall be comforted and have hope. We shall be established. The strength of God will be given. These truths reach even into the twentieth century. We may live in them and by them today. Christ is the foundation. He is the cornerstone, the rock of ages. When our faith in Him is firm, and we battle royally in His name, we may be certain that our life has a real foundation, and that the anchor of our hope will hold for ever.

> "The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
> I will not, I cannot desert to His foes;
> That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
> I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"
>
> "K" in *Rippon's Selection*

THE PRAYER

O Lord, our ship is so frail, and the ocean is so wide! We thank Thee that we have a Pilot who can bring us safely to the other shore, and is able to rebuke the winds and the waves of life. Amen.

WHEN WE OBEY THE LORD

THE SCRIPTURE

And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." . . . But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

2 Kings 5:10, 13-14

Pathos and human interest fill the story of Naaman the leper. Though a man high in the service of his government, he was afflicted with a loathsome and incurable disease. Only those familiar with the conditions of one thus afflicted can fully understand what it meant.

Then there is the "little maid from the land of Israel" who had been carried off in one of the raids and forced to become the servant of Naaman's wife. This little maid knew the God of Israel and the prophet Elisha. Though a captive she is, nevertheless, interested in the welfare of the husband of her mistress. So she says to her, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

Naaman, who undoubtedly had tried every possible known help for his disease, secures permission from the king to go and see the prophet. So, loaded with rich gifts, he goes to the king of Israel. But when the king hears of his mission, he is distressed, and exclaims, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?"

When Elisha hears about the king's problem, he declares, "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." Thereupon Naaman proceeds with his horses and chariot and halts at the house of Elisha. Elisha sends a messenger with the words, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

Naaman flies into a rage and cries out, "I thought he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?"

As he is ready to return home in disgust, his servants come to the rescue, urging him at least to try the simple

remedy that Elisha prescribed. Somehow the words reach his heart. After all, he is seeking help, and he had better humble his pride, and do as the prophet told him. So he goes and dips himself seven times in the Jordan, and comes away with "the flesh of a little child."

How often is it not true that we permit petty pride to hinder a childlike faith! We have an ingrained tendency in spiritual matters to want to think that we "earn" salvation. We try good deeds, and virtuous living, and personal striving, when what we need to do is to throw ourselves in the arms of the Savior. We need but remember the words of the Book of Revelation about the saved: "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

> There is a fountain filled with blood,
> Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
> And sinners plunged beneath that flood
> Lose all their guilty stains.
>
> WILLIAM COWPER

THE PRAYER

Our Father, we thank Thee that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Lead us in humble faith to Him for the cleansing which we need. For we ask it in His name. Amen.

TOWARD PEACE AND CALMNESS

THE SCRIPTURE

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. Matthew 8:23-26

The reader is reminded that Feb. 2 is Candlemas Day, the Day of the Presentation of Our Lord. The meditation for this day is found on pages 224-226.

A flood of contemporary literature as an aid to inner peace and serenity is a most eloquent testimony to the state of storm and turmoil in modern life. Our generation is anything but calm and secure. Living within hours and minutes of the enemy's bombing bases creates a deep and hidden fear in the heart of a nation. The dangers of accidents, multiplying in proportion to the advances of a mechanized age, haunt the minds of men from hour to hour. Uncertain conditions in the rule of nations and in the markets of the world bring about a destructive concern in the minds of men. More than any generation past, our generation knows the cost of progress and the gradual drawing together of the geographical distance between nations at odds with each other.

If all this were limited to a sort of impersonal society, it would be bearable. But it is not that way. The real brunt of worry and anxiety makes itself felt most devastatingly within the individual heart. Tension and turmoil, anxiety and worry—these seem to be the peculiar mark of modern man. There are no worries quite as destructive as one's own personal worries! Many will say that unless the Christian gospel has something to say to the individual man at the point of his inner needs, it is not worth the time we spend on it.

The assurance of the gospel is the declaration that God is not asleep during the storms of man's life. When Jesus came in human flesh, you may say, He did sleep at the time of the great tempest. Yes, He was man, and He craved all the things that are needed for normal living. But He did awaken at the call of the disciples who somehow knew that He had within Him the power to help in time of need. They had cried to Him, "Save, Lord, we perish." He awakened, and by a firm rebuke to the winds and the sea, He brought about an immediate calm.

Is this story only a figure to lend a psychological boost

to lagging spirits? Or is it a real illustration of God's power over the storms that afflict mankind? Christian history has proven the latter to be true. Jesus has proven to be the one who can bring peace and calm to the human breast. Martyrs have died on Christ's behalf, but they have died in peace. Christians locked up in prison have found release for their spirit in calmness and serenity. Christians with their own private worries and troubles have found in Jesus the one who can still life's storms.

Yes, the gospel speaks to men personally; else its voice does not count. It speaks to men in the time of their personal storms and stresses; else it is a sham. While making wise use of all that modern man is writing to help us recover peace and calm, let us make sure of the eternal truth that Jesus is awake to our needs, and will still the storms of our lives.

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
  When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
  It is well, it is well with my soul.

PHILIP PAUL BLISS

THE PRAYER

Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

THE DEBT OF LOVE

THE SCRIPTURE

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Romans 13: 8-9

The gospel abounds in paradoxes, lessons which superficially seem to be contradictory but actually reveal deeply the most profound consistency and logic. One of these paradoxes is found in what the New Testament has to say about "debt" and "love." They seem to be at opposite poles of meaning; but in the New Testament they belong together.

Love in its purest form is often said to present a most completely undeserved action. The lover who loves most purely has no thought of receiving anything in return. No one tells him to love, and no one compels his love. God's love was pure love. It preceded all human love, for it existed before man was created. The love that exists among men has sprung from the fountain of God's love, though man in his sinful and selfish state is unable to love as God loves. On earth mother's love is the highest expression of love. Even before the new baby is born into the world, the mother's heart and her whole body are working together to love the unborn child; and after the child has come into the world, the mother's action becomes entirely self-giving toward the child without any thought of return. Human love in its highest dimensions is usually compared with these expressions of love, God's love and mother's love. And consistent with their nature, they seem to be anything but the expression of debt.

How then can the Apostle speak these words, "Owe no man anything, except to love one another"? He speaks as though love is a debt that must be paid. Yes, he speaks as though he were forgetting his own words to follow, the several "thou shalt not's" of the Ten Commandments. There was no inconsistency in his words, for he hurried on to the New Testament summary of the law, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. . . . Love is the fulfilling of the law." The reader of the New Testament must remember that the Ten Commandments were originally given to those who did

not know Christ, and the New Testament law is for those who know Christ.

It should be clear to the Christian that love as a positive expression more than outbalances the negative commands of the Old Testament Law. Christian love becomes the natural outflow of the heart of the Christian filled with the loving action of God. The Christian owes it to his own nature to love. He can't be himself without love, for being filled and renewed by the love of God in Christ, he can do only one thing. Christ's action of love was a debt to his nature of love; the loving actions of the believer in the world also are a debt to his own nature. God expressed his love by acting on man's behalf; the believer shows his love by acting on behalf of his fellow man.

We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

WILLIAM WALSHAM HOWE

THE PRAYER

O God, the King of love and righteousness, lead us, we pray, in the ways of responsible love; may we not glory in the acts of welldoing, but rather find them to be the expressions of love that we owe our fellow men. Grant that the love of Christ which we have in our hearts may be expressed in our lives. Amen.

TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

THE SCRIPTURE

After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

John 6: 66-69

"To whom shall we go?" is one of the constant questions of life. We are always asking it in one form or another, sometimes consciously and sometimes quite unconsciously. One may think that one's mind is addressed to other questions, Where shall I go? What shall I think? What can I know? What can I believe? And it is assumed that the answers to these questions will show the way of life.

What is realized by all too few is that the question of our meditation is life's real question. Man attaches himself to persons rather than ideas. The persons around us are more significant than the place where we are. The persons with whom we share our life speak more of the truth we accept than the intellectual formula of the truth we profess. In politics it is the personality of the candidate rather than his expressed principles that determines the voter's choice. Every effective campaign strategy is tuned to the candidate's personality, while the issues are made vague and general. Great military commanders, influential scholars, religious leaders—very few can separate their persons from their abilities in the public image. Experience underscores the priority of persons to ideas in influencing the way of human life.

This is the reassuring element in the gospel message. It has been built around a Person, the person Jesus Christ. The history of the church has been built around and on that same Person. Jesus Christ is the foundation of our faith. Ideas about Jesus, knowledge of His life and work, theories of salvation, all came later after men had had a chance to ponder the meaning of Jesus Christ in the lives of His followers. This accounts for the strange fact that to know the gospel is an experience of those who have grasped the knowledge of a Person rather than the content of the knowledge of ideas. That is why the gospel is as wide open to children as to adults. In this sense a Christian is

one who has discovered the One to whom he should go to get the answer to the issues of life.

Peter had caught a truth that comes out of the simplicity of relationship of one person with another person. He was untutored in the way of science and philosophy. Yet he caught the truth whereby men live, and he caught it at the highest level. There was one Person to whom he had gone, one whom he acknowledged as Lord. One Person it was in whom he had caught the "words of eternal life." There are no greater words than these; all other words are subordinate. In the way that Peter went the believer follows, the way that leads to Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God.

Christ, Thou art the sure Foundation
  Thou the Head and Cornerstone;
Chosen of the Lord, and precious,
  Binding all the Church in one;
Thou Thy Zion's help forever,
  And her confidence alone.

Latin, sixth or seventh century

THE PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, with the apostle of old we come to Thee saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Grant that our words may come with deep understanding and with simple conviction. Amen.

FAITH'S FOLLOW-THROUGH

THE SCRIPTURE

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Hebrews 11:23-25

In common Christian vocabulary few words occur more frequently than the little word "faith." The tragedy is that common usage has found it to be one of the most impotent, misused and abused of all words. It has become much too commonplace. For many it has lost its meaning; and without meaning it has no power. Any rediscovery of the living nature of the gospel depends on a recovery of the meaning of faith.

The Protestant Reformation was important in Christian history for the simple reason that it brought new dimensions to man's understanding of faith. It brought out clearly and forcefully that salvation is not of works but of faith. Faith, simply stated, is nothing more than man's receptive openness to God's saving action. Salvation is not of works, but of faith. All that man can do is to let God enter in and take over the task of salvation. It is just here that man finds the problem; by nature he is not ready or willing to let God do it all; and until he learns this, there is no full understanding of the meaning of faith.

If it is difficult to understand faith as the beginning point of salvation and justification, it isn't strange that difficulty is encountered when faith would follow through into every area of life. If it is difficult to let God into our lives to work His saving grace, it is more difficult to let Him in to work through us in all the activities and efforts of the Christian life.

The faith chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews is a summary of the faith that was lived as God's activity. "By faith Moses was hid three months," "by faith Moses refused to be called the Son of Pharaoh's daughter," "by faith Moses forsook Egypt," "by faith he kept the Passover," "by faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea," "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down," "by faith Rahab perished not with them that were disobedient." This is an illustrious portrayal of those who by faith lived in the light of divine promise; they

were not satisfied just with the faith that brought them salvation; their faith followed through into life.

This is the story of the host of Christians who have lived in the bright and open radiance of the Epiphany revelation. By faith they received salvation; by faith they lived their lives. This is the only way the Christian life can be lived, for it is God at work through those who are willing to give Him free access.

O Jesus, I have promised
  To serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
  My Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
  If Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
  If Thou wilt be my guide.

JOHN ERNEST BODE

THE PRAYER

Almighty and everliving God, who hast given great and precious promises to them that believe: strengthen our faith in Thy Son Jesus Christ, that we may sincerely receive Him as Savior, and obediently follow Him as Lord. Amen.

PEACE IN HIS PRESENCE

THE SCRIPTURE

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them, saying, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

Matthew 14:26-27

The miracles of Jesus as portrayed in the gospel narratives are wonderful to ponder. But a word of caution is necessary. These miracles are to be recognized, not primarily as a sensational display of power for man to wonder at, but as the ways chosen by Christ to teach truth that is deeper than miraculous action. No matter how great the miracle may appear, the underlying truth is still greater. The most wonderful miracle was not in what happened to the physical elements, or to sick bodies made well, or to water changed to wine, or to blind eyes that were made to see, or to the catch of many fishes; the real and most wonderful miracle lay in what happened to human hearts in the presence of the external miracle.

In every instance the miracle in the human heart was related to the presence of Jesus who had worked the wonderful work. In every case it was a change in attitude toward Jesus. Nowhere is this more plain than in the miracle of Jesus' walking on the sea and stilling the winds of the tempest. It was a distressed sea, and the winds were contrary. The night was dark. Excitement and fear ran high among the disciples. At the peak of their trouble Jesus appeared and spoke in a clear voice, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." As though to overlook the miracle of walking on the water, Peter leaped out to go to the Master. Distracted by the winds, he became intensely afraid, and began to sink into the sea. Jesus stretched forth His hand, and took hold of him, and said, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" The winds ceased and the disciples were again restored to calm. Worshiping Him together they said, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The lesson is plain. When the disciple kept his mind on things around him in the storm of life, he floundered; when he concentrated on the person of Jesus, things became calm around him and there was peace in his heart. Therein is the secret of peace in the human heart, to keep one's eyes fo-

cused on the presence of Jesus. This is one of life's most essential lessons. No day is without the storm that threatens to engulf man. In the gospel Jesus is present, walking across the waters, holding out his outstretched arms to save.

To each man the miracle of the calming change within the heart in the presence of Jesus is more wonderful than the miracle of which he reads on the printed page of Scripture. To know it in just one small incident in real life is more wonderful than to know all the miracles recorded in the Gospels. There is peace to be found in the presence of Jesus!

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
  Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
  The beauty of Thy peace.

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

THE PRAYER

O Lord, sustain us in life's troublesome day, and abide with us as the evening comes and the shadows fall. Help us to live with inward calm in the midst of a hectic world, that in peace we may be prepared for our eternal company with the saints in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE BOLDNESS OF FAITH

THE SCRIPTURE

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control. Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1: 7-10

A dictionary definition explains that "boldness" is the "quality of possessing or showing courage." It is a good word, though often used in a bad connotation. It is a word that befits the Christian spirit. The Apostle exemplified it in his own life in the courage he showed against all manner of opposition and trials. It was most appropriate therefore that he should urge it upon the Christians of the first-century church.

The spirit of love and power and discipline is God's direct gift to the believer. When these are directly appropriated, there is little room for timidity and weakness and vacillation. Life has its stern problems from which the Christian is not excused; for God never promised that the Christian life would be without its troubles and perplexities.

Paul was not only the friend of youth; he was also acquainted with the problems of youth. How else could Timothy have accepted him as a spiritual father and counselor? For youth do not entrust themselves to the counsel of elders who show little understanding of youth's problems. What Paul saw in the trials of the young man Timothy must have been very much like the problems that face the youth of every generation. When a young man comes to faith he encounters at once the tensions of life. For Timothy there was the side of faith, and there was the side of unbelief. Each side had its friends. A choice had to be made. There was no middle ground. This always makes it hard for the young Christian.

When a young man comes to a fresh experience of Christ, his voice cannot be stilled. He must speak out for his faith. This is not an easy thing to do. Immediately the opposition and the scoffer make themselves heard. With taunts and ridicule, sometimes quiet and subtle, sometimes blatant and open, they seek to embarrass him to the point of denying his faith. They seek to arouse self-consciousness and hesitation on the part of the new convert. It would be denying the

facts of reality to say that Timothy was immune to the weapons of the unbeliever. Surely it was not an easy thing for him to stand up for his faith.

A young soldier, a church member, upon returning from a long stay in the service, was asked how he fared with his Christian faith in the service. His answer came quickly, "Everything went all right. They never discovered that I was a Christian." How contradictory that a soldier schooled to be brave, could not carry his courage over to his Christian life! Christian boldness brooks no contradictions of this kind.

With one accord, O God, we pray;
  Grant us Thy Holy Spirit;
Look Thou on our infirmity
  Through Jesus' Blood and merit;
Grant us to grow in grace each day
By holy baptism, that we may
  Eternal life inherit.

THOMAS HANSEN KINGO
Tr. *George Alfred Taylor Rygh*

THE PRAYER

Preserve in us, O Lord, the gift of Thy grace, that, by the power of the Holy Sacraments, which we have received, we may be strengthened to walk diligently with the people of God. Amen.

THE SYMBOLIC ACTS OF FAITH

THE SCRIPTURE

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

Exodus 14: 21-22

Human credulity is strained when told that a simple stretching out of the hand is sufficient to open up a dry pathway through a wide ocean of water. Nor does the mature reader of Scripture believe that the strong east wind will be stilled and the floor of the sea will turn into dry land by the simple stretching of the hand. No, not even if Scripture does tell us that Moses worked this miracle. It was not within the power of the hand or the heart of Moses to work a miracle of this kind. His stretching of the hand was a gesture of obedience in faith that the Lord would do as He had promised. He knew, and all Israel knew, that it was the work of the Lord.

The raised hand of Moses was plainly a symbolic act of faith. He was assured that it was the Lord who had led the people out of Egypt and had promised deliverance. It was the Lord who had promised an open way through the Red Sea; and His was the power to fulfill the promise. Christians of every generation, especially of an intellectual generation, must be reminded of this. God is still at work; it is He who has complete control of life and all the elements of His created world; He alone can open the way to lead man safely through life's troubled seas.

There are countless gestures of faith in the life of the Christian. Life as given by God is by nature sacramental; God is always the great mover and the supreme doer of good. Man's participation is as the symbolic act of faith. This is evident in the sacraments of the church. God is the actor in Baptism; the believer prepares the water and the service; he brings the child to be baptized; but these are only symbolic acts. In Holy Communion God comes in the true presence of Christ; man prepares the earthly elements; he repeats the Words of Institution; he bows his knees; he confesses his sin; these are the symbolic acts of his faith. God is still the worker of the miracle.

The Christian life is replete with gestures of the sym-

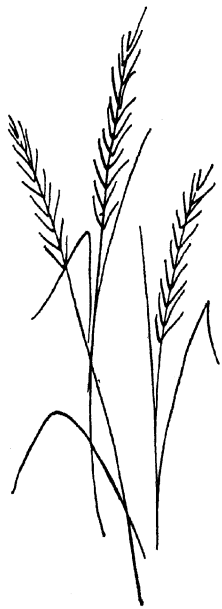
bolic acts of faith. Bowing the head in faith, the family assembled around the Word in devotion, a visit to the house of God on a sabbath morning, a hand raised in benediction, a word of love to the unlovely, an act of charity to the downtrodden, a word of testimony—these, added to many more, are symbols of faith. Where beats the heart of confident faith, there will come some visible gesture and token that testify to men. But the work that follows is of God.

Lead on, O King eternal:
  We follow, not with fears,
For gladness breaks like morning
  Where'er Thy face appears:
Thy Cross is lifted o'er us;
  We journey in its light;
The crown awaits the conquest;
  Lead on, O God of might.

ERNEST WARBURTON SHURTLEFF

THE PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God, who makest us both to will and to do according to Thy good pleasure: let Thine unfailing presence be felt by Thy children that they may do those things that come of faith and accomplish those things that will bring fruits that abound to Thy glory among men, that the way may ever remain open for men to come to Thee and find safe lodging in the eternal home; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



WHEAT OR WEEDS

THE SCRIPTURE

"So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Matthew 13: 26-30

Before the advent of our capable machines and weed killers the matter of weeds in the field could be a cause of backache and weariness. Even with the new inventions and chemicals, the weeds are still a problem. Whether wearily picked by hand with a stooped body or with the modern appliances, the picking or killing of the *weeds only* is a grave concern, because the purpose is to give the grain a better chance to grow.

In the parable of the wheat and the weeds this problem was aggravated by the fact that the weeds looked like the wheat until the time of harvest. So we have the word of the householder, "Let them both grow together until the harvest." Then the difference could be clearly seen, the weeds could be separated and burned, while the wheat was carefully harvested.

Here we have a parable. The field is the world of human beings. The good seed means the children of the kingdom of God who hear His Word and keep it. The weeds are the children of darkness who neither listen to the Word nor keep it, but who rather despise it. The enemy is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world.

Here we think of the church as the field. Its members are weeds or wheat. We are now a part of the "church militant," the church on earth, where no man can truly judge the heart of another. In the "church triumphant" in eternity there will be only those who are a part of the "communion of saints." There are church bodies which claim to have only "true" Christians in their fellowship. They often ask, "Why is *he* allowed to be in the church?" They rarely ask, "Why am *I* allowed to be in the church?" They seem to be strangers to the words of the saint who, beholding a criminal on the way to execution, exclaimed, "There go I but for the grace of God."

The church is for sinners who know their sins, and desire to be delivered. It is for people who, like Paul, feel

within themselves the battle between the good and the evil, and know that they have to throw themselves on the mercy of God, and seek the victory in Christ alone. The Christian is one who flees from Sinai to Calvary, finds forgiveness in Christ, and then seeks by God's grace to follow in His steps.

Here we behold the patience of God—a patience which we all need. For the time will come when the net is drawn to shore, and when the harvest is gathered. Then there will be a division, but it will be in the hand of God. A saved soul is what God wants. We continually tread a dangerous path. God is asking us to read, hear, keep His Word, and to pray without ceasing. He wants us to be wheat for His garner!

His oath, His covenant and blood,
Support me in the sinking flood;
When every earthly prop gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

EDWARD MOTE

THE PRAYER

O Lord, we beseech Thee, keep Thy Church and household continually in the true faith, that they who lean upon the hope of eternal life may evermore be defended by Thy mighty hand, through Jesus Christ, Thy son, our Lord. Amen. *The Hymnal*

LOVE IS THE BOND OF UNION

THE SCRIPTURE

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:12-16

In this rich passage of Scripture Paul twice uses the expression, "put on." We are reminded of the word in his Letter to the Galatians: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." We are further reminded of Paul's word: "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus."

The basis of this transformation is to be found in God's love to us as that love has been revealed in Christ Jesus. Paul had such an overpowering experience of his unity with Christ through faith that he could say that it was no longer he who lived, but Christ lived in him.

As we take a look back in this chapter we hear Paul say that there are certain things that we should "put to death." Perhaps we can use the phrase, "put off." Those things are: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Then, with the spirit of Jesus dwelling within us, we move on to the catalog of things which the indwelling and motivating Christ will bring about in our lives. There is compassion—the sharing of our brother's needs; kindness—"be kind to one another"; lowliness—"not to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think"; meekness—we have learned something of the blessedness of meekness; patience—we are to possess our souls in patience.

There is to be a forgiving spirit—"forbearing one another." There is to be a recognition that we are still in the flesh with its temptations and failures. Therefore, "as the Lord has forgiven [us], so [we] also must forgive." Then there is that beautiful chain of love which "binds everything together in perfect harmony." The peace of God is not only to "keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"; it is to rule in our hearts, and thus create a community of love. And there will be gratitude. Thankfulness is the mark of the one who knows that God has been good to him, and that he owes all his blessings to God.

It will follow that the word of Christ dwells in us richly, as we teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. A deep sense of God's redeeming grace will find utterance. We cannot look at this beautiful picture of Christian life and community without a certain longing. How wonderful, if it were completely true in our community! And in the world!

We must pray to God that He will make us more deeply aware of Christ in our lives; that He may dwell in us more completely; that instead of jealousies and hatreds and fightings within ourselves and among ourselves, we may be changed into persons of complete self-giving to our Lord and to our fellow men.

Our God is love, and all His saints
His image bear below;
The heart with love to God inspired
With love to man will glow.

THOMAS COTTERILL

THE PRAYER

Help us, dear heavenly Father, ever to strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and Christian fellowship. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

THE WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY

THE SCRIPTURE

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward."

Mark 9:38-41

Life is filled with circles that shut people out. There are societies of all kinds for which those who are elected must "qualify." Thus areas of exclusiveness are set up, and with them is associated something of the pride of achievement.

But of Christian love Paul says that it bears all things, is not self-exalting, nor conceited. Strange as it may seem, these temptations can become very powerful in the realm of the spiritual life. We can become proud and competitive in the smugness with which we clothe ourselves.

Before us is the story of a man who was doing a blessed work—casting out demons. Whoever he was, he should have been judged by the sincerity of his deeds as well as by the favor with which God looked upon what he did. But John constitutes himself the inquisitor. He examines the man, and thinks that he has found heresy. So he comes to Jesus with the statement that he had forbidden him, because he was not one of their group, thinking that he would find support for his action.

But he had misjudged the temper of the Savior of mankind. Jesus had the answer: "He that is not against us is for us." Here is a unique word from the lips of Jesus. Yet it reveals His wide outlook. This man was doing God's work, and therein he had his credentials.

We notice that John said, "He was not following us." Thereby he revealed a weakness that so easily besets us. We are prone to set up limitations. They become norms for us. By them we exclude or admit according to our standards. We are constantly in danger of being more interested in ourselves, our institutions, our way, than in Christ and His cause. Others must fit into the groove that we have made. They must have had the same experiences that we have had.

Thereby we overlook the wideness of the love of Him who came to save a fallen race. Jesus is not limited to your per-

sonality or to mine. He can use any one who is dedicated to the doing of His work.

If we look more to Jesus, we shall be helped to see how much there is in life that can contribute to the kingdom of God. What would we have seen in the sinful woman at the well? Or in Zacchaeus? Or in Matthew? What do we see in the woman of the street as a potential witness for the Savior?

The exclusiveness, the criticism, and the suspicion that have often characterized the Christians indeed comprise a sad chapter. If we were but more eager to exalt the Christ in our own life and in the world, we should be spared this sinful attitude.

Let us look to Jesus who can dominate and use all personalities, and who has salvation for all races in all places. We shall then be saved from narrowness, because we have the mind of Christ. Paul speaks of those who even preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but concludes: "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice." Should not we pray for grace to rejoice whenever, and however Christ is preached?

For the love of God is broader
  Than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
  Is most wonderfully kind.

FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER

THE PRAYER

Save us, O Lord, from narrowness of mind and spirit. Give us a love and concern that is as wide and as deep as that revealed by Jesus. Help us never by pettiness of soul to keep a fellow human being from Thy kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

WHAT DO WE THINK OF THE CROSS?

THE SCRIPTURE

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart."

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 1 Corinthians 1:18-21

The word "cross" is common in human life and experience. We speak of the cross of suffering, the cross of sorrow, the cross of defeat, the cross of temptation to sin. But the real significance of the word is exhausted only when we speak of the cross of Christ and its meaning in our experience and life.

The cross is common in symbolism in the Christian world. There is also a present emphasis on the use of the cross even as an ornament. If the real meaning of the Cross is understood and accepted by those who wear the symbol, it may have value for the Christian life.

Paul had been chosen to preach the gospel of Christ. It was to be not in wisdom of man's words, but in the power of God. Paul was, further, determined to know no one but Christ, and to preach nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Christ—His cross and His resurrection—was central in his message.

The church of Jesus Christ has only one message: Christ and the Cross. And we have but one fundamental need: the word of the Cross and our redemption through its power. Sometimes people think they have grown too wise for the Cross, and want to have something less offensive preached to them.

But what is the use of talking about reform, about better economic conditions, of a deeper sense of brotherhood among men, when hearts are bound in sin, full of selfishness and greed? It is only in the hearts of the redeemed that such words can have any real meaning. Isaiah said to the people of his day that all their sacrifices would avail nothing until their hearts and lives were right before God.

Therefore our central theme must still be the Cross. We can never get away from it. For the Cross does something to us. It humiliates us, as it reveals our sinful hearts. It atones for us, for on the cross Jesus paid the price of sin for us, in order that we might have forgiveness. It gives us

new power, the power of His resurrection. It is men and women who have been at the Cross for pardon and cleansing who are able and willing to be great for God. For to those who are saved it is the power of God to salvation.

Our life and destiny will be determined by what we think of the Cross. It can be the greatest factor to bless us. Accepting the atonement that is in the Cross, and taking up His cross and bearing it, reveal that we are truly His.

The Cross can rise up to curse us. If we despise it, it reveals us as among the despisers and the unsaved.

So the questions face us: What do we think of the Cross? What does the Cross say of us? The answer is vital to our eternal destiny.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
  I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
  Life that shall endless be.

GEORGE MATHESON

THE PRAYER

Heavenly Father, bring us in humility and faith to the Cross for pardon and cleansing. Help us also in the footsteps of Jesus to bear whatever cross Thy sovereign will shall lay on us as His followers and servants. In His name we pray. Amen.

THE SEED GROWS SECRETLY

THE SCRIPTURE

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Mark 4:26-29

Back of all that lives and grows is the heavenly Father's will. We sometimes speak of it as the providence of God.

We have a God who neither slumbers nor sleeps, whose eye is alike on the sparrow and on the infinite galaxies of stars. He is constantly at work in the universe.

God is at work in the earth, upholding it with the power of His might. Therefore the farmer, after he has sown his seed, is able to depend on the stability of God in God's nature.

The seed brings forth its fruit in due season. Unless other forces intervene on the earth which has been cursed by man's sin—floods, storms, hail, blight—there will be growth, and eventually a harvest.

Jesus tells us it is thus in the kingdom of God. The parable of the seed and the parable of the leaven describe for us both the expanding and the transforming power of the Kingdom. The growth may at times seem to be slow, too slow for our impatient spirits, but it is there nevertheless. We need to remember that there have been harvests. As a matter of fact, we who have been brought to faith in the Savior are a part of that harvest. In all areas of the world there have been harvests of human souls, as God's servants have gone forth to sow the good seed of the gospel.

God may be at work in the world today in ways which we cannot fathom or understand. Yet it is God who brings the growth and the harvest. All that we can do is to be diligent in helping to sow the seed by our prayers, our testimony, and our support.

God is dependable, whether it be in His earth or in the realm of spiritual life. But we cannot go ahead of God. Many a little boy has ruined his garden by picking the fruit before it is ripe. Sometimes parents push their children, and thereby cause injury rather than promote their growth.

God has His seasons. When the grain is ripe, the sickle is put in for the harvest. There is a tide in all areas of life.

The farmer waits for the grain to ripen. Parents, if wise, only give guidance. The teacher must wait for the right moment, the pastor for the crucial experience, so that the ripening harvest is not ruined and lost.

The farmer plants; God gives the growth. We labor in the Kingdom; God gives the increase. The sowing of good seed is important. The co-operation and support of God is assured.

All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown;
First the blade and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear:
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.

HENRY ALFORD

THE PRAYER

Dear God, make us faithful workers in Thy kingdom. Give us also the patience to rely on Thee to bring the harvest to fruition, knowing that all things are in Thy gracious and powerful hands. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GROWING UP

THE SCRIPTURE

That we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

Ephesians 4:14-16

Often we hear it said about someone: "He is a stable person." By such a statement we mean one whose personality is properly bound together. He knows what he believes; he has convictions. He knows what his duty in life is, and pursues it to the best of his ability. He has a consciousness of his destiny, and is gratefully and calmly moving toward it.

We usually have high regard for such a person, and wish that we had more of that quality. Perhaps there may even be a bit of envy in our heart because we have not been able to attain it.

Here we are thinking of the mature Christian, one who has grown to "mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Such a person is no longer a mere child in Christ. He has partaken of the "solid food" which the Lord wants us to eat.

So he is not tossed about by every wind of doctrine that blows around him. How those winds do blow! We hear all kinds of extravagant statements about the kingdom of God, about the second coming of Christ, and about the end of the world. The air is literally full of them, as we may hear when we turn the dial on the radio on a Sunday or late at night.

But the Christian is one who grows up. He grows "in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." He believes that Christ is at the center of the Scriptures, the Old Testament pointing toward Him, and the New Testament giving the story of His life, His ministry, His atoning death, and His glorious resurrection. He believes that Jesus is the one who spoke with intimate understanding and authority of the heavenly Father; that He revealed the Father's love, and that He performed the Father's works.

The Christian is one who believes that Jesus wants to draw us all to himself, even as He invited us in the words, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will

give you rest." He is grateful for the homely figure Jesus used when He compared himself to the hen that would gather its chicks under its wings, and he is glad to be counted among those who do gather under His wings, and there find security.

This is true for you and for me as individuals. It is also true for His body, the church. When we together confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior, we are accepting the union with Christ and the stability which He wishes for us. When we accept the words of Luther's majestic hymn, "His kingdom is forever," we share in the stabilizing of our own life and the life of the church. For then we do recognize Him as the head "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love." We thereby experience the deepest meaning of the stability which He provides.

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.
MARTIN LUTHER
Tr. Frederick H. Hedge

THE PRAYER

Our God and Father, give us the faith which will sustain us under all conditions of life, and the stability which faith in Thee provides. We ask it through Him who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."
Amen.

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT ENOUGH

THE SCRIPTURE

"Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel? And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness; and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins."

Ezekiel 33:11-12

We sense a note of intense seriousness in this message from Ezekiel. It would be helpful to read this passage through verse 16. We observe thoroughgoing contrasts in his words. 1) The righteous cannot live on a stored up capital of past righteousness, if he sins deliberately. 2) There will be forgiveness for the wicked, if he truly repents, and turns from his wicked ways.

God's will is the salvation of all of us. He does not desire that the wicked should die in his wickedness, and he does not desire that the righteous should fall away into deliberate sin. Ezekiel pleads in behalf of the Lord, "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?"

The true Christian cannot ever take the attitude that he is going to be happier in heaven as he contemplates the torture of the damned in hell. Such a feeling is foreign to the heart of our loving heavenly Father, and it must be foreign to the hearts of His children. God does all that love can do to save us and all men. If we are saved by His grace, we must take thought, offer prayer, and make sacrifice for the salvation of others.

But the love of God is not permitted to undercut the demands of His righteousness. We read in our Scripture the solemn warning: "The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses." This is clear language. There can be no reserve of righteousness and good works against which we can draw for sinning. There cannot even be sinning so that "grace may abound." We must forever rid ourselves of the idea which some have held and hold—always a temptation—that in some way we are God's pets. There remains for us the solemn warning, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

No one is safe in his own strength. Paul was fearful lest, after he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway. There are enough examples all around us to cause

us to flee daily to God and pray that we may not be led into temptation, and that, if tempted, we may flee to Him for deliverance.

Turning the picture around, Ezekiel says that the wicked can be forgiven, if he truly turns to the Lord in sincere penitence. Here we have a foretaste of the spirit of Him who said to a thief—perhaps a murderer—when he repented, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," and who said to the sinful woman, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again."

We have only one recourse: daily to draw near to the throne of mercy; to follow closely in the footsteps of our Savior; to depend on nothing but His forgiving grace; and to pray that we may render the service which is "active in love."

> Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
> Pilgrim through this barren land; . . .
> Strong deliverer,
> Be Thou still my strength and shield!
>
> WILLIAM WILLIAMS

THE PRAYER

Dear God, keep us ever so close to Thee that amid all the storms, all the temptations, and all the dangers of this present life we shall be kept secure because we have committed ourselves to Thy care. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE SONG OF SIMEON

THE SCRIPTURE

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." Luke 2:25-32

Candlemas, The Day of the Presentation of our Lord, is one of the minor festivals of the Church Year. On that day the candles which were to be used in the service of the church during the year were dedicated.

It is the day, furthermore, which commemorates the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. According to the law, forty days after the birth of a son, the time of purification was at hand. As offerings to the Lord, a lamb was presented for the burnt offering, and a pigeon for the sin offering. For persons in poverty, two pigeons could be offered, which was true in the case of Joseph and Mary.

Among those who were in the Temple at the time was the aged Simeon. For the moment he is the central figure. He is a symbol of the spiritually-minded people who were looking for the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. Therefore he is in the Temple by the Spirit's guidance at the time the Lord Jesus is brought in. By that same guidance he recognizes the Child, and knows that here is the fulfillment of all that he has been waiting and hoping for.

Thereupon he is given the privilege of receiving the Christ child in his arms, and as he does so, he breaks forth in what is known as the "Nunc Dimittis"—"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." That for which he had waited in faith had received fulfillment. Now he is ready to depart.

There are beautiful ways in which this thought of "nunc dimittis" works itself into the life of every Christian. There is the daily experience of it. At the close of day the little child lies down uttering the prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep." After the hours of play, there is rest and slumber. In that respect we need never grow old. When evening comes, we commit our cares to God, and lie down in peace.

For the Christian there is also the weekly nunc dimittis.

This passage of Scripture has appeared at the close of the evening service. The Lord's Day is a day of rest and of spiritual recreation and nourishment. We leave the house of God in peace, because the peace of God is upon us.

There will also be a final nunc dimittis. It will come at the end of our earthly journey, when we move on into the life beyond. We are nearer with the passing of each day. This is the departure to which Simeon refers.

Simeon had seen the salvation of the Lord, and it was therefore that he could depart in peace. It is in order to ask ourselves, Have we seen it? Have we looked to Jesus in faith? The Light of the World would shine into our souls. Without it, we are in the darkness of sin. But we may become so radiant with the Spirit of the living God within us, that we shine for Him in a world which apart from Him is dark and gloomy.

O Lord, now let Thy servant
  Depart with heav'nly peace,
For I have seen the glory
  Of Thy redeeming grace:
A Light to lead the Gentiles
  Unto Thy holy hill,
The glory of Thy people,
  Thy chosen Israel.

ERNEST EDWIN RYDEN

THE PRAYER

Almighty and everliving God, we humbly beseech Thy majesty, that as Thine only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto Thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Hymnal

THE EPIPHANY ROAD

THE SCRIPTURE

Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." Acts 9:3-6

Epiphany opened with the account of a long road trodden by the weary-bodied but joyous-hearted Wise Men from the East. Because of the Spirit of God which filled their hearts and to which they had given ready response, they started out on their long journey to find Him who was to come as King. They had seen His star in the sky! They followed hopefully! And it brought them to the place where they saw a child, yet a King, in all His heavenly glory.

Today is set aside for the commemoration of the great Apostle Paul. It is the day of another Epiphany road. Paul's motives in beginning this journey were quite the opposite from those of the Wise Men. They had looked for a King that they might worship Him. Paul, then called Saul, went out to destroy those who followed Jesus, to wipe them from the face of the earth. But it turned out quite otherwise.

As Saul went his way, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him," and he heard the voice of Jesus saying, "Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." In that moment Paul was changed. Deeply! Radically! Totally! He was never to be the same again! He had become a Christian, but significantly and necessarily, a Christian with a missionary command to go to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). From that moment there were two things most certain in his life: he had seen Jesus; and, he had a command to bring Jesus to the Gentiles. Once his name was Saul; now it was to become Paul. The old name meant "asked for" or "demanded." His new name meant "little one." To obey God is to make self small; to demand of God is to magnify self.

Every Christian has had his Epiphany road! Each one meets it in his own time and in his own way; but all Christians share the common experiences of the road.

Whatever may be the motive in starting out on the road, one sees Jesus at the end. This is the essence of Christian

conversion, of being a Christian: to see the glory of Jesus in the face of one's own littleness. The Magi were men of wealth, wisdom, and prestige; but in the presence of Jesus they bowed low, and offered their gifts. Paul was a man of learning and of zeal, though badly directed; but in the presence of Jesus he saw himself as the little one. This is the Christian miracle: to see Jesus at the end of the road, whether one started out to find Him or to destroy Him.

Whatever may be the plans for one's life, a revolutionary change takes place when one sees Jesus in the Epiphany glory. The Wise Men came to worship Him; they went away to proclaim Him. Saul went to persecute and destroy; Paul went away to obey, to preach, and to bring His light to the Gentiles.

It is fitting, therefore, that Epiphany should be considered the great missionary season of the Church Year. Its banners carry the caption, "Come and see—Go and Tell!" Those who go its way to the end can never be the same again!

The secret of the Lord
  Escapes each human eye,
And faithful, pondering hearts await
  The full Epiphany.

JAMES RUSSELL WOODFORD

THE PRAYER

O God, who didst teach the multitude of the Gentiles by the preaching of blessed Paul the Apostle: Grant us grace, that we, who this day recall his conversion, may by his example be led to Thee; through Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the Day

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